YOGA

THE TOP 100 BEST YOGA POSES

RELIEVE STRESS, INCREASE FLEXIBILITY, AND GAIN STRENGTH

Susan Hollister

VISIT…

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Yoga

The Top 100 Best Yoga Poses Relieve Stress, Increase Flexibility, and Gain Strength

By Susan Hollister
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Table of Contents

INTRODUCTION

CHAPTER 1: THE MANY BENEFITS OF YOGA

CHAPTER 2: YOGA AND YOUR LIFE

CHAPTER 3: WARMING UP FOR YOGA

- The Mountain
- The Forward Fold
- The Half-standing Forward Fold
- Wrist Stretches
- Neck And Shoulder Stretches
- Pelvic Tilt
- The Cow-Cat
- The Leg Stretch
- The Goddess Pose Stretch

CHAPTER 4: YOGA FOR THE LEGS

- The Big Toe
- Extended Hand to Big Toe
- The Chair
- The Tree
- The Easy
- The Extended Triangle
- The Lord of The Dance
- The Extended Side Angle
- The Revolved Side Angle
- Legs Up The Wall

The High (Crescent) Lunge
The Garland
The Revolved Triangle
The Warrior
The Warrior 2
The Reversed Warrior
The Warrior 3
The Lotus
CHAPTER 5: YOGA FOR THE ARMS AND SHOULDERS
The Gate
The Handstand
The Firefly
The Dolphin Plank
The Upward Plank
The Extended Side Angle
The Eagle
The Crow
The Cow Face
The Dolphin
The Eight Angle
The Chair
The Half Gate
The Noose
The Peacock
The Shoulder Press

The Plow
CHAPTER 6: YOGA FOR THE BACK
The Bridge
The Extended Puppy
The Wide-Angle Seated Forward Bend
Spine Twist
The Cobra
The Locust
The Standing Half-Forward Bend
The Sphinx
The Sage
The Hero
The Revolved Head to Knee
The Reclining Hero
CHAPTER 7: YOGA FOR THE HIPS
The Bound Angle
The Reclining Bound Angle
Child's Pose
The Boat
The Fire Log
The Happy Baby
The Heron
The Eye of the Needle
The Wide Leg Forward Bend
The Side Reclining Leg Raise
CHAPTER 8: YOGA FOR THE NECK

The Cat
Dolphin Plank
The Fish
The Ear to Shoulder
The Corpse
CHAPTER 9: YOGA FOR THE CHEST
The Half-Moon
The Low Lunge
The Monkey
The Upward-Facing Dog
The Wild Thing
The Lion
Bird of Paradise
CHAPTER 10: YOGA FOR THE HANDS
The Salutation Seal
The Deer Seal
The Scale
The Side Crow
The Side Plank
The Four-Limbed Staff
CHAPTER 11: YOGA FOR THE WHOLE BODY
The Half Frog
Downward-Facing Dog
The Staff Pose
The Intense Side Stretch
The Wheel

The Bow
The Camel
The Upward-Facing Two-Foot Staff
The Pigeon
The Supported Headstand
CHAPTER 12: MUDRAS AND BREATHING TECHNIQUES
Seal of Knowledge
Seal of Sun and Life
Mental Clarity
Seal of Patience
The Three-Part Breath:
The Skull Shining Breath
CHAPTER 13: SAMPLE YOGA ROUTINES
Quick Beginner's Routine For Back and Lower Body
Flexibility Routine for Beginners
The Early Morning Sun Salutation
Stress Relief Routine
The Cool-down
CHAPTER 14: CREATING YOUR OWN ROUTINE
CONCLUSION
MY OTHER BOOKS

Introduction

I want to thank you and congratulate you for getting this book. Yoga is more than just another way to exercise your body and mind – it is a series of physical positions or stretches with Indian/Hindu roots. These “asanas” or “poses” (the English translation) can have a positive impact on your physical, mental, and emotional well-being. They are widely understood to increase the energy flow throughout the body; they help purge the body of toxins, sharpen the mind, and free the emotions. They are also known to enhance spiritual awareness. Although the direct historical roots of yoga are unclear, experts believe the practice to be more than 5,000 years old.

What we know today as yoga is a relatively recent form of the ancient practice. Introduced to America in the early 1900s, modern yoga is a mix of ancient Indian indigenous cultural practices and asanas, blended with modern gymnastics, physical therapy, and naturopathy.

Modern yoga was designed to help individuals become more self-aware, tuned into their body’s needs, while opening up to both feelings and intuition. At the same time, it provides a full-body workout, including strength training and stretching. Contrary to popular belief, yoga is not a religion, although some people have included it as part of their religious practices. That is understandable, because this form of exercise is highly effective at removing distractions, calming the emotions, and clearing the mind, which lays a foundation for increased spiritual awareness. In this book, however, the focus will be on the physical aspects of yoga practice and how they can benefit your mind and your emotions.

The majority of yoga positions stimulate the glandular system, encouraging your internal organs to function efficiently. This exercise practice also promotes deep, controlled breathing, which encourages a centered, peaceful mind and a calm, alert spirit. The consistent practice of yoga can lead to many amazing physical, mental, and emotional benefits that you definitely don’t want to miss out on!

While we will detail specific potential benefits of yoga in the next chapter, here are a few of the things you can look forward to when you put into practice the

poses in this book. Yoga:

- Protects your body from a multitude of physical conditions, ranging from migraines to heart disease.
- Keeps your bones and skeletal support system strong.
- Boosts your mental health and supports the functioning of the neurological system and other "invisible" body parts.
- Is a cost-effective way to stimulate your mental health, your physical health and your spiritual well-being.
- Can be very easy to master.
- Can be practiced by nearly anyone, anywhere.

Yoga comes in a variety of forms and levels of difficulty, ranging from very basic to extremely complex. Hatha Yoga, the most popular form, is what you are probably most familiar with. It focuses on posture, movement, and breathing. Other types of yoga focus intensely on breathing and meditation while others focus on aspects of wisdom and traditions associated with various forms of religion. This book, however, will focus primarily on the physical and mental aspects of Hatha Yoga.

A Time for Yoga

Yoga can be practiced by adults of any age or physical condition. As you will see throughout this book, certain poses are not recommended for individuals with specific physical conditions. Other poses can be practiced with modifications. Listen to your body; if your body is uncomfortable with a certain pose, back off and find out why.

Your mind, emotions, and body are tightly intertwined. What affects one will impact the other. It is not uncommon for someone to consult a doctor when his or her emotions refuse to respond to professional counseling. In the same way, if physical conditions don't respond to yoga, a trip to the doctor may be a good idea.

Sometimes a visit with a trained yoga instructor can correct positioning that

would otherwise cause harm, or would prevent you from experiencing the full benefits of a specific pose. However, little potential harm can come from practicing the beginner-level poses in this book, if you follow the instructions and honor the restrictions that are given for each one. Feel free to let these pages be your introduction to the wonderful and challenging world of yoga.

Women And Children

Some experts recommend that women who are nursing, pregnant, or menstruating should forego yoga entirely, but most admit that while the most strenuous poses, especially inversions, should be avoided during menstruation and pregnancy, some of the gentler asanas can actually be beneficial. In this book you will discover poses that are frequently used to relieve menstrual pain, address the symptoms of menopause, and support a woman's body during pregnancy.

Nursing mothers often benefit from poses that can support the muscles used to hold a baby while nursing, avoiding backache and injury caused by the repetitive motions of lifting and carrying a baby. It can also relieve postpartum depression and help both mother and baby relax during those first few weeks of adjusting to breastfeeding. Some mothers even opt to nurse their infants while they perform various yoga poses.

Prenatal yoga is a wonderful way to stay in shape while pregnant. A knowledgeable yoga instructor will be able to adjust your workouts as your pregnancy progresses and suggest specific asanas to strengthen your body for the delivery process.

In each of these cases, a conversation with a professional yoga instructor is highly recommended. A professional will be able to guide you in practicing yoga effectively and safely, adapting some poses and suggesting others that might not have crossed your mind.

Children of all ages can enjoy yoga; it can provide plenty of enjoyable play with peers and parents alike. The breathing exercises can help a child gain body-awareness and increase mental control. The only possible dangers posed are the same dangers experienced by young gymnasts. If the exercise becomes more than just fun play, if children are encouraged to push themselves beyond what is fun and natural, young developing bodies can be harmed rather than helped to

grow. For most children, however, yoga is fun, a delightful form of play.

Getting Started

There are many ways to learn yoga. One popular option is to take a class with other students under the guidance of an experienced trainer. If you lack the funds or your schedule prohibits meeting with a class you may choose to learn yoga from videos. There are even interactive video games that can help you develop your yoga skills!

A third option is to become your own teacher. While it will help to consult with an experienced instructor periodically, you can easily teach yourself, using a combination of text and visual aids – both of which you will find in this book.

I have provided proven step-by-step instructions to help you master the most popular and most broadly effective yoga poses. These instructions include breathing techniques and mental strategies to help you experience all the benefits yoga has to offer. Everything is described in detail, so you can get started immediately on the basics.

You will discover how to properly warm up for yoga and will quickly master the basic mountain pose, which is the springboard for numerous other yoga asanas, or poses. Throughout this book, you will find step-by-step instructions that walk you through the process of mastering each yoga position. You will also discover a variety of poses that address each part of your body.

In addition, you will learn how to nurture your developing yoga practice, from beginning to advanced level poses. I cap off the book with five sample yoga routines that address specific needs. This is followed by an entire section on how to customize your yoga practice to accommodate your own physical needs and to address mental, emotional, and sometimes even spiritual concerns. At the same time, you will find tips for fitting yoga into your current lifestyle. You will discover that yoga can truly enhance many aspects of your life.

Yoga is a great activity to explore; it is inexpensive and, really, has no downside! To get started, all you need is a set of comfortable clothes. Sure, you can use a yoga mat if you want, but even the mat is not essential; it just provides a clean surface with a little padding and can prevent your body from slipping out of position.

As time progresses and you decide that yoga is something you want to enjoy long-term, you may choose to invest in additional pieces of equipment. Blankets are helpful to support parts of your body during some poses. Yoga blocks can help support your body, while yoga straps can help you connect your hands or bridge the gap between hands and feet in some poses. As I said though, none of these are required, so don't let their lack stand in your way. Now, let's get started!

Chapter 1 : The Many Benefits of Yoga

Even if you're inexperienced with yoga, you've probably heard others talking about it. You may have even heard reports of its many benefits. While you may harbor initial skepticism about the usefulness of yoga, modern research is now available to back up many of the claims reported by yoga practitioners.

Believe it or not, many celebrities swear by yoga! Stars such as Jennifer Aniston, Lady Gaga, Adam Levine, and Kate Hudson have credited yoga with helping them get in shape for various movie roles. They have also used it to help them mentally focus, heal from injuries, and to protect themselves from re-injury. Some celebrities have even credited yoga with helping them overcome addictions and face incredibly stressful life challenges.

Yoga is hardly a prissy activity, so don't let those svelte women in cute leotards mislead you. It's a grueling form of physical training. Many professional athletes swear by yoga. LeBron James, Shaquille O'Neal, former NHL goalkeeper Sean Burke, and Blake Griffin swear by it. "Yoga can be hard." says John Capouya, author of *Real Men Do Yoga*. "Not bed-of-nails painful, just tough. You're in for a demanding, athletically challenging workout here."

Of course, you don't have to be a celebrity or a superstar to enjoy the benefits of yoga. Nor do you need a perfect body. While the stars may have the ability to hire top-notch instructors, you can still enjoy the benefits of yoga wherever you are. All you need is this book and the willingness to teach yourself.

Once you truly understand all the good things yoga can provide, it is likely that you will feel even *more* confident and motivated to try it out. Are you wondering if yoga is worth your time? Take a couple minutes to acquaint yourself with some of its amazing benefits. Yoga:

- Promotes flexibility. Yoga can gradually loosen your muscles and increase the flexibility in your joints while retaining their integrity.

- Improves brain function. 20 minutes of yoga can sharpen your mental focus and improve your memory.

- Helps you develop strong and flexible muscles. It leads to protection from chronic conditions and can reduce the likelihood of falls and injuries.

- Protects against heart disease. Yoga can lower your risk of heart-related conditions such as overly high or low blood pressure, unsafe blood sugar levels, and high cholesterol.

- Gives you impeccable posture. Poor posture can cause a slew of joint and muscle problems over the years, but knowing how to balance your head properly over your spine can greatly reduce the amount of strain on your back. Yoga increases your body awareness, making it easier to adopt and sustain postures that avoid excessive stress on any one joint.

- Can help you reach and maintain a healthy weight. Research has shown a correlation between consistent yoga practice and a decrease in body weight. Yoga can also boost the metabolism and support the transition from fat to muscle tissue.

- Protects your joints and cartilage from wear and tear. Yoga involves a full range of motion, which encourages your body to provide your joints and supportive tissues with the nutrients they need to remain healthy and strong. It can help reduce the pain and stiffness of arthritis and reduce the chances of developing other conditions that restrict physical movement.

- Can improve your sex life. Research has found that four months of yoga can increase the sexual performance of both men and women. It enhances blood flow to the genitals and strengthens the sphincter muscles, along with increasing flexibility, strength, mental focus, and total body awareness. In short, yoga can provide a tremendous boost to your sexual activities.

- Safeguards your spine. Certain yoga positions can help strengthen your spinal disks, which act as shock absorbers for your vertebrae and promote proper skeletal alignment. When your back is properly aligned, it protects your nerves and allows them to communicate freely throughout your body, providing health and all-around well-being.

- Helps to heal chronic migraines. Several studies have shown that consistent, long-term yoga practice can help to resolve or reduce the occurrence of chronic migraines. Experts now believe certain yoga positions help prevent physical misalignment while helping to fend off mental stress, thus relieving migraine symptoms and minimizing migraine triggers.

- Enhances bone health. Since many yoga positions leverage your own body weight, yoga is a great way to strengthen your bones. The practice of yoga can also promote healthy cortisol levels, which helps your bones preserve calcium.

- Fends off cravings. The University of Washington reports that yoga has a positive impact on diet awareness. Those who practice yoga are much more mindful of the needs of their bodies and consequently of what they eat and drink. It is easier to choose healthy snacks when you are aware of how unhealthy snacks impact your body.

- Boosts your blood circulation. Yoga increases blood circulation by relaxing your muscles. Better blood circulation increases cellular oxygen levels, which can help every part of your body perform more effectively.

- Eases chronic back pain. Yoga increases muscle strength and flexibility, especially to your core. This has been proven to ease numerous painful back conditions.

- Boosts your immune system. When you sustain a specific yoga position, it helps to flush out your lymph nodes and stimulate various internal organs. This gives your body a greater advantage when fighting infections, cancers, and other diseases.

- Enhances fertility. While there are few studies that support yoga's positive influence on fertility, many believe that by helping to reduce stress, yoga contributes to increased fertility levels in women.

- Helps your heart. Yoga poses are great for heart health. The longer you hold a specific position, the more your heart will work to supply the energy your body needs to sustain the pose. Certain poses, like the mountain and the easy pose, open up the heart and its surrounding region

to increased circulation. The chair, the triangle, and the cobra actually require your heart to work harder.

Breathing is too important to overlook; yoga's two-to-one breathing ratio, where you exhale for twice as long as you inhale, has been shown in several studies to enhance heart health even as it boosts circulation.

- Speeds hangover recovery. Ever regret all those drinks you enjoyed the night before? Certain yoga poses (for example, the cat cow and the corpse) focus on working out your thyroid gland and wringing alcohol-generated toxins from your liver and kidneys. They can also boost your metabolism, which can then work to resolve hangovers in a more efficient manner.

- Can decrease blood pressure. Two British studies have shown that, compared to inactivity, the corpse actually causes a drop in blood pressure.

- Eases asthma symptoms. One study has shown that yoga can ease mild to moderate asthma symptoms in adults, because it promotes mindful breathing techniques and induces muscular relaxation.

- Natural mood enhancement. Several studies have shown that practicing yoga can increase the amount of serotonin in your brain and decrease the amount of cortisol. Higher levels of serotonin are linked to increased feelings of happiness.

- Helps individuals with Multiple Sclerosis. Evidence now indicates that yoga may help those with MS by increasing circulation, boosting their mood, and enhancing their physical abilities.

- Can decrease blood sugar. Studies have linked yoga directly to decreased levels of bad cholesterol and increased amounts of good cholesterol, making it much easier for diabetics to manage their blood sugar. The bow, the plough, and especially the tree, when practiced on a regular, extended basis have helped many diabetics to return to healthy blood sugar numbers.

  Yoga addresses the primary cause of blood sugar spikes: stress. The deep

breathing that accompanies many asanas promotes relaxation of body and mind while the physical positions enhance proper functioning of systems that regulate cortisol and serotonin production and release.

- Boosts your memory. Experts believe that a reduction of mental and physical stress can help people focus and organize their thoughts in an efficient manner. In this, yoga excels. The tree and the lotus both support clear thinking.

- Encourages focus. Research shows that consistent engagement in yoga can improve coordination, memory, and reaction times.

- Can delay signs of aging. Practicing yoga can help your body cleanse itself of toxins, which can delay visible signs of aging.

- Relaxes your nervous system. Since yoga postures and breathing can cause you to relax, it can unwind your nervous system's fight-or-flight impulse, freeing you to generate a calm, thoughtful response to challenges.

- Boosts your energy levels. Consistent yoga can consistently boost your metabolism and elevate your energy levels.

- Enhances your balance. Yoga is great for improving your posture, which is a great first step to better balance. Even before you get to the poses where you stand on one leg, practicing yoga can stabilize your balance.

- Reduces your body's sodium levels. Yoga can decrease the levels of sodium in your body in two ways. First, your muscles use up sodium as they contract to sustain a yoga position. Secondly, many yoga asanas energize your kidneys, increasing their ability to flush excess sodium from your body.

- Releases tension. We unconsciously build up tension in muscles without even realizing it. A prime example occurs when a dangerous road or dense traffic lead us to grip the steering wheel tightly as we drive. Sustained, this death grip can lead to chronic tension, soreness, and muscle fatigue. Yoga can help you become aware of which muscles are carrying tension and can help you relax them. When muscles relax, they

drain the buildup of toxins and increase the circulation of blood, oxygen, and nutrients to the area's tissues. This, in turn, facilitates the healing of muscle fibers, which leads to stronger muscles that work with greater ease.

- Increases your red blood cell count. Research has shown that yoga can help boost the number of red blood cells in your body.

- Facilitates sleep. Research suggests that the relaxing nature of yoga can help encourage a better night's sleep. Specific yoga poses (for example, the child's pose in Chapter 11) are designed to prepare mind and body for times of rest.

- Increases and maintains hand-eye coordination skills. Yoga is a great way to develop and maintain excellent hand-eye coordination; it's even more effective than gaming. The body-awareness fostered by yoga can also increase your depth perception.

- Promotes proper breathing techniques. Studies suggest that those who practice yoga are less likely to take huge gulps of air. Yoga also prevents shallow breathing by including specific instructions for controlled, deep breaths as part of each yoga exercise. Proper breathing boosts circulation, helps the immune system, encourages relaxation, and stimulates clear thinking, along with a host of other benefits.

- Protects your digestive system. Stress can aggravate digestive issues such as ulcers, constipation, and diarrhea. Yoga can easily help these conditions. Many of the yoga poses in this book will stimulate your digestion. Any of the spinal twist positions are especially good at helping the digestive system operate smoothly.

- Boosts self-esteem. Many people who participate in yoga report feeling an increased sense of gratitude and a greater ability to forgive, which in turn provides a huge boost to your self-esteem.

- Can serve as a supplement for – or an alternative to – modern medicine. Yoga has been used to treat a variety of conditions for millennia, well before the advent of modern medical modalities. Never stop taking your medication without first consulting your doctor, but if you can see

improvements in your health as a result of practicing yoga, don't hesitate to request a medical review of your condition.

Still not convinced of the awesomeness of yoga? Here are a few more quick facts:

- People have been practicing yoga for at least 5,000 years.

- There are more than 100 different yoga poses; their execution can range from slow and gentle to fast and intense.

- Yoga can target almost every area of your body. It can massage internal organs not easily reached by any form of massage.

- Yoga can provide your body with a complete but low-impact workout.

- Research suggests that yoga can provide as much of a cardiovascular workout as aerobic exercise.

- Yoga can be the perfect non-competitive group activity.

- Yoga is highly affordable; you can spend next to nothing to learn the basics. On the other hand, you can invest considerable sums to ensure you get the best professional instructors, the perfect tools, and effective learning materials.

- You can practice yoga anywhere – outside on a beautiful sunny day or indoors, regardless of the weather.

- Yoga requires minimal equipment. Many people use yoga mats to minimize slipping, sliding, and uncomfortable sitting on a hard surface, but it's not absolutely necessary to own one. Some people also utilize yoga balls, blocks and straps, but again, you can exercise effectively without them. A towel can substitute for a strap in most cases, a sturdy book or metal cans of food can stand in for yoga blocks, and a blanket can serve as a makeshift yoga mat.

- You can practice yoga even if you have a health condition. Just discuss your intentions with your doctor beforehand. Throughout this book I will

alert you to contraindications for specific physical conditions. Certain poses will require adaptations, while other poses should be avoided entirely, based on your physical restrictions. Yoga is quite possible – indeed, it can often reduce symptoms – for individuals with heart disease, high blood pressure, diabetes, high cholesterol, and arthritis.

- Prenatal yoga is available for women who want to stay strong and in shape throughout pregnancy. Some poses strengthen muscles you will use in the birthing process, while others will energize you and help you through those early weeks of sleep deprivation after your baby is born. There are poses to help you wake up and others to help you prepare for sleep. Postpartum depression can be alleviated as well, since both the breathing practices and many yoga poses help to balance the emotions.

Whether you're in perfect health or you live with any range of physical or emotional challenges, yoga can help improve your quality of life. It can prevent disease, minimize symptoms, and can provide you with extraordinary mental health benefits. Yoga can directly improve your overall sense of well-being, which can help you maintain a positive mood and an upbeat attitude. Yoga has been found to improve self-acceptance as well as self-control. It can help reduce hostility and boost social skills.

Most importantly, yoga is easy to learn and master. Experts recommend two to three days a week from thirty minutes to an hour and half each, maximum, as the ideal amount of time to spend practicing yoga. Even if you only spend one hour a week, total, on yoga, you can still experience all of its amazing benefits! For that matter, even five minutes a day can prove helpful, so if you only have that much time between activities, use it wisely on yoga. You won't regret it.

Chapter 2 : Yoga and Your Life

There are seven primary forms of yoga: Hatha, Vinyasa, Power, Ashtanga, Bikram, and Iyengar yoga. Hatha is the most common and easiest form of yoga. It combines breathing techniques and basic movements. Vinyasa yoga combines multiple poses that smoothly transition into one another. Power yoga is an intense form, designed to build muscles quickly. Ashtanga is similar to Vinyasa yoga in that it combines multiple poses that smoothly transition into one another; it is unique in that the poses include special breathing techniques. Bikram is a collection of 26 yoga poses designed to be performed in very hot temperatures. Finally, Iyengar yoga utilizes objects like blocks or chairs to align the body in the proper position. In this book, we will focus primarily on the first form, Hatha Yoga.

If you are already a committed practitioner of yoga, you probably will use established routines and will have successfully worked yoga into your life. In that case, you may want to skip the rest of this chapter and go directly to Chapter 3, where we start getting into the nuts and bolts of yoga, the various poses.

Yoga For Any Lifestyle

Is yoga the right type of workout for you? I would assert that yoga can accommodate any lifestyle. There are aspects of yoga that can be implemented in a meeting, on a plane, at your desk, pretty much anywhere. Because yoga doesn't require special equipment, it is easy to maintain your daily yoga practice when you travel. Even if your life is hectic, you can (and should) introduce yoga into your daily routine, if only for five minutes at a time.

If you already have a solid workout routine, all the better; Yoga can easily be tacked on to either end of your workout. You can regularly practice yoga whether you have a set schedule or one that varies wildly. It makes no difference whether you live in the mountains, on the beachfront, or in between. Whether you live in a studio apartment or a 20-bedroom mansion, you can still find space for yoga! In other words, there's really no excuse *not* to include yoga as part of your life. It's so beneficial, why not give it a shot?

When and Where

If you already have a regular workout routine, you can easily introduce a single yoga position into your cool-down. Use a single pose for several days, before moving on to anything else. This gives your body time to adjust to the new positioning and truly learn its process, which can be more challenging than it appears on the surface.

The "when" and "where" of yoga doesn't matter as long as it's consistent. The consistent practice of yoga is what makes it effective. Many people find that waking up a half-hour earlier than usual to incorporate a yoga routine into their lives produces noticeable results.

Yoga is a great way to get your day started. Other people rely on yoga in the evening, claiming it helps them fall asleep easier. Don't have time to wake up a half hour early? You can also practice yoga at work if your environment allows. Many of the poses can be performed while sitting in a chair. You can execute others while standing, waiting in line, or putting on makeup. The only restriction: do not practice yoga within a couple hours of eating.

To make it easier to practice yoga whenever and wherever opportunity presents itself, I recommend keeping a yoga mat and a set of comfortable workout clothes in your car. You never know when it'll come in handy Even though you can do yoga everywhere and anywhere, I recommend that you set aside a comfortable space in your home just for yoga. One of my friends was fortunate enough to have an extra room in her home that she set apart for yoga. Dubbed "The Yoga Room", it was carpeted, the walls were uncluttered, and the room contained only the items she needed for her yoga work. I found it clean, open, refreshing, and relaxing – the perfect place for yoga. If you don't have the space to devote a whole room to yoga, you can at least clear a portion of a room – preferably with a wall, as it will come in handy for occasional support.

Your Yoga Plan

The next step is to establish a plan. If you are just beginning to explore yoga, it is important that you enter the practice gently. Your body needs time to ease into the changes you are introducing to it. At the same time, your body needs to experience yoga on a regular basis, so you can begin to discover its benefits in

your body, your mind, and your spirit.

A gentle introduction to yoga would be to give yourself five minutes a day to enter into one or two of the poses. Yes, five minutes is all you need at first. Tack it onto one of your existing routines. For example, if you have a set routine you follow for the start of your day, five minutes of yoga added on can help you clear your mind and rev up your body, preparing for action. On the other hand, if you have a series of activities you normally follow before you go to bed (and if you do not, I highly recommend you start), five minutes of yoga can help you relax and can prepare your mind and body for a good night's rest.

Start with one or two poses that work for you. After a couple weeks, try out another pose or two. As you begin to notice the benefits in the form of greater alertness and flexibility, etc., feel free to expand your yoga time to 10 minutes a day or longer.

Once you reach the point that you are expanding your yoga practice to 20 or 30 minutes at a time, you should consider giving yoga a timeslot of its own. Sure, you can keep yoga for the start or end of your day, but if you find it is cramping your mornings or evenings, feel free to experiment with other times of day. I suggest you continue using one or two yoga positions to help you wake up and to prepare you for sleep; at the same time, give yourself at least three set blocks of time a week to devote to more extended yoga practice.

Chapter 3 : Warming Up For Yoga

Everybody knows the importance of stretching before running or working out, but what kind of warm-up does yoga require? While traditional stretching is helpful before performing yoga, since most yoga poses are advanced stretches in and of themselves, there are a number of yoga positions you can use to warm up before you delve into the more involved practice.

The unique aspect of warming up for yoga is the process of centering oneself, at the same time you wake up your muscles. A yoga physical warm-up is also a mental warm-up that allows you to move away from your other preoccupations and reach a calm mental stance that will assist you in further yoga work.

An ideal yoga warm-up will include poses that involve both your upper and lower body. It should incorporate stretches that attend to your wrists, your neck, and your spine, key parts of your body that receive the most work when you're doing yoga. In this chapter, you will discover some great poses you can use as part of your personal warm-up routine.

The Mountain

Focus: Legs, Posture
Level: Beginning
Total Time: 60 seconds
Indications: Sciatica, stress
Contraindications: Low blood pressure, dizziness, light-headedness, headache

The Mountain

The mountain pose is a great starting warm-up. It can prepare your body for many other standing poses. It is also great for your posture and can help you remain calm under pressure as you face your day. It may look like you are just standing, but there is much more going on than meets the eye. Here is how to perform the mountain pose:

- Stand with your feet separated enough to feel stable. If you are pregnant, you may need to adjust your feet further apart, but don't separate them any farther than your shoulders.

- Establish a solid connection with the ground by lifting your toes. Shift

your weight distribution so that it is divided equally between the base of your big toes, the base of your little toes, and both left and right sides of your heels. Sustain this weight distribution as you return your toes to the ground and continue through the exercise.

- Bend your knees slightly and straighten them. This will relax the knee joints. Your legs should be straight, but never locked.

- Beginning from your feet up, become aware of each part of your body as you engage the muscles to support a tall, straight torso, topped by the tip of the "mountain", your head. Imagine a string reaching up from the top of your head and pulling it – along with your neck and the torso it is connected to – upward.

- Activate your thigh muscles by turning them ever so slightly inward.

- Allow your chest to open up, shifting your shoulders and arms backward. Tip your tailbone slightly under to offset the adjustment you just made to your chest. This will naturally engage muscles around your bellybutton to support your abdomen and keep your back, neck, and head directly above your hips (which should still be directly above your knees and feet).

- Stand tall and straight, with your arms relaxed at your sides. Focus your gaze straight ahead. Look at something that is just below eye level. This will increase your mental focus, remove distractions, and ensure that your chin is slightly lowered, if it hasn't already been adjusted by that string pulling up from the top of your head!

- As you stand in this position, breathe in, filling your lungs, allowing your stomach and chest to expand. When your body is full of air, begin to exhale, taking twice as long to breathe out as you did to breathe in.

- Take several full breaths, sustaining this posture for 30 to 60 seconds before you release it.

The mountain is easily practiced while you're standing in line and waiting for, well, anything. It can help you remain calm if other people around you are growing impatient and angry, allowing you to spread kindness in your wake. You can engage this pose any time you're standing. It serves as a conscious

counter-action to all the time we spend hunched over our computers, bent over a book, or focused on a project.

You can continue to warm up by transitioning from the mountain pose to the **forward fold**.

The Forward Fold

Focus: Hamstrings, back
Level: Beginning
Total Time: 60 seconds
Indications: Mild depression, stress, insomnia, headaches; stimulates kidneys, liver, digestive system
Contraindications: Back injuries, pregnancy (careful modifications are possible)

Forward Fold

To perform the forward fold:

- Stand with your feet firmly planted, spread slightly apart for balance. Distribute your weight evenly across your feet, and hold your torso tall and open. Inhale.

- Breathe out and bend your body forward at the hips, not the waist. Bend only as far as you can while still breathing easily.

- Press your heels into the ground, keeping your hips over the soles of your

feet.

- If your hamstrings are too tight to straighten your legs completely, keep your knees bent. If you can straighten your legs completely, place your fingers on the ground.

- Let your head and neck hang freely.

- Breathe in and add more length to your torso, then breathe out to settle more deeply into the pose.

  If you were to stop here, you would slowly raise your torso, stacking one vertebra at a time atop the others, until you have returned to an upright position. However, for this warm up you want to transition into the **half-standing forward fold.** This will extend your spine and further strengthen your back and knees.

The Half-standing Forward Fold

Focus: Hamstrings, calves, back
Level: Beginning
Total Time: 60 seconds
Indications: Stress
Contraindications: Back injury

Half-standing Forward Fold

- From the forward fold, raise your torso until your flat back is parallel to the ground. Place your hands on the front of your legs. Breathe in, draw in your abdomen and use your back muscles to support your torso and keep your spine straight.

- Maintain length from your head to tailbone through your spine

- Pull your shoulder blades away from your ears and gaze forward

- Breathe several times before rising to an upright position and resting, with feet slightly separated, in mountain pose.

Wrist Stretches

It is important to warm up your wrists before engaging in most yoga poses; many require you to bear weight on your wrists. The following are some basic wrist stretches and warm-ups you can use to prevent injury and increase flexibility:

- Get down on your hands and knees; place your hands directly above your shoulders and your knees above your hips. Fold your hands under so that your palms face up and your fingers point toward your knees. Breathe in and rock your body forward slightly, moving gently. Breathe out and slowly move back. Repeat this motion at least four times.

- Stand tall and stretch out your right arm in front of you with your palm facing down. Relax your wrist, letting your fingers drop down. Use your left hand to grasp these fingers and gently pull them back toward your body.

- Press your hands against each other as if you were praying. Lower your hands gently until you feel a stretch. Hold the stretch for 10-15 seconds, then release. Repeat

- Hold your elbows against your sides with each hand in a soft fist. Keeping your elbows against your sides, move your wrists in a figure eight motion. Continue this motion for 10 to 15 seconds, then rest and repeat**.**

Neck And Shoulder Stretches

Stretching your neck and shoulder area prior to performing yoga is equally important. Here is a great way to get your neck and shoulder joints lubricated and moving smoothly:

- Begin in a seated position, keeping your shoulders down and your spine straight.

- Keeping your hips grounded, breathe in and reach your arms up so that your fingertips are pointed toward the sky.

- Breathe out as you move your left ear toward your left shoulder and bring your left hand down over your head to gently stretch your neck to the left.

- Breathe in, straighten your head, and reach your arms up to the sky again.

- Repeat the previous motion but to the right.

- Breathe in as you reach your arms up and lock your fingers together to push your palms toward the sky.

- Breathe out as you bring your interlocked palms down to press on the back of your neck while you move your chin toward your chest.

Pelvic Tilt

Finally, it is important to warm up your **lower back** prior to engaging in yoga. Your spine literally supports the rest of your body so it is extremely important to warm up the surrounding muscles prior to engaging in any yoga activities.

The pelvic tilts can help loosen your spine, especially if your back is stiff.

To perform a pelvic tilt:

- Lie down on your back and bend your knees.
- Press your lower back into the ground, tilt your pelvis up, then release.
- It is ideal to repeat a pelvic tilt for at least 15 repetitions.

Another great spine warm-up stretch for yoga is the cat cow stretch.

The Cow-Cat

Focus: spine
Level: Beginning
Total Time: 60 seconds
Indications: intervertebral disks, abdominal organs, menstrual discomfort; stimulates adrenals, kidneys
Contraindications: modification for neck injury

Cow-Cat Stretch

To perform the cow-cat:

- Begin on all fours, with your spine neutral (straight) and your neck long. If you have a neck injury, you will keep your head and neck in this neutral position throughout the exercise. Your knees will be hip width apart, directly under your hips.

- Your hands will be placed directly beneath your shoulders, with your fingers pointing forward. Do NOT lock your elbows. If you have a wrist injury, slightly flexing your arms at the elbow will provide additional support. If your injury doesn't allow you to bear weight on your wrists, rest your forearms on a chair or another slightly raised surface.

The Cow

- Breathe in, (optional: curl your toes up on the ground) as you relax your abdomen and let it sag downward.

- As your middle back sags, lift your head and look up. Pull your shoulders away from your ears.

The Cat

- Breathe out slowly as you change from the cow to the cat position. (optional: relax your toes).

- Allow your head to lower until it hangs relaxed. At the same time, press your belly button up toward your spine, pushing your back into a hump, like a cat arching its back.

- This will tuck in your tailbone and tilt the bottom of your pelvis forward.

Repeat the cow-cat stretch five times, returning to the neutral spine position we started. Over time, you can increase your repetitions up to 20 in a single setting.

From the neutral back position, you can easily transition into a leg stretch.

The Leg Stretch

- Starting on all fours with a neutral spine, point your right toes, straighten your right leg behind you, and raise it toward the sky and hold this position for a few seconds.

- With your leg in the air, slowly flex your foot and hold the position for a few seconds.

- Relax your foot and return your leg to the starting position.

- Repeat this stretch with the left leg.

Now, stand up and end your warm-up session with the goddess pose stretch.

The Goddess Pose Stretch

Goddess Pose Stretch

- Begin in mountain pose, standing with your feet together, your torso upright and tall, lifting through your entire spine up through the top of your head, as if it had a string pulling it straight up to the sky.

- Raise your arms out straight from your sides, palms facing down. Spread your legs apart so that your feet are directly below your wrists. Once you've established that distance, bend your arms and rest your hands on your waist. Then turn your feet out slightly, to about a 45-degree angle.

- With your hands on your waist, feel where your hips are, then tuck them slightly under, tilting the bottom of your pelvis forward.

- Bend your legs and let your upper body sink down slightly. Check the distribution of your weight across your feet. Adjust your weight until it is divided equally across all parts of both feet. You don't want your knees to roll forward; keeping your feet firmly planted will help to keep your knees aligned over your heels.

- Straighten back up, now that everything is aligned correctly. Breathe again and lower your torso again, keeping your hips tucked. Allow yourself to sink deeper into the bend, keeping all four corners of your feet (the big toe side, little toe side, inner, and outer parts of the heel) supporting your body equally. As you sink into this stretch, your upper thighs will engage and start to roll out, just a little. Keep your chest high and breathe deeply.

- Straighten your legs again, raising your torso. Breathe deeply. On an exhale, bend your legs to lower your torso again, keeping your weight distributed evenly across your feet. Tuck your hips and sink down deeper into the bend, letting your legs, from your toes up through your thighs actively support your body.

- Now, raise your arms straight out from your waist. Rotate your arms so that your palms face forward, and bend your elbows to raise your hands until your fingers point straight up. Spread your fingers apart, keep your shoulders back, your elbows even with your shoulders, and your face looking forward. Breathe deeply in, then slowly out. Breathe in again, then as you exhale, lower your arms and straighten your legs; rise up, letting the energy pull your torso up through that string reaching up from the top of your head.

Chapter 4：Yoga For The Legs

The Big Toe

Focus: Hamstrings
Level: Intermediate
Total Time: 60 seconds
Indications: stimulates liver and kidney, relieves headaches, insomnia menopausal symptoms
Contraindications: lower back injury, neck injury

The Big Toe

The big toe pose focuses on your hamstrings but offers many additional amazing benefits. It stretches your calves and thighs while energizing your liver and kidneys. It can also help improve your digestion. For women, the big toe can help relieve menopause symptoms and can help any headache sufferer or insomniac.

Note: you can perform this yoga pose seated or standing. These instructions are for the standing pose, which requires less balance and is a little easier to complete.

- Stand with your feet six inches apart. Raise your kneecaps by tensing your front thigh muscles . Without bending your knees, breathe out and fold your body forward at your hips, reaching your arms down until you can reach your feet. Keep your shoulders low, away from your ears.

- Place your index and middle finger on each side of your big toe and grip your toe by wrapping your fingers together with your thumb while pressing your toes into the ground.

- Breathe in, expanding your rib cage and keeping your back straight. Without rounding your back, straighten your arms. Extend the front of your body and breathe out.

- Relax your forehead and let your neck extend in a straight line from your spine as you breathe out.

- Breathe in, continuing to hold your big toes. On each breath out, relax your hamstring muscles further.

- To exit this pose, release your toes and raise your torso until you are standing upright, with arms at your sides.

Extended Hand to Big Toe

Focus: Ankles
Level: Intermediate
Total Time: 30 seconds
Indications: improve balance, calm mind, improve focus
Contraindications: low back, ankle injury

Extended Hand to Big Toe

The extended hand to big toe is great for building strength in your legs and ankles while stretching the backs of your legs. It can steady your balance. If you have ever incurred an injury of the lower back or an ankle injury, you should avoid this pose.

- Begin by standing in mountain pose. Stand tall and straight with your feet separated enough to feel stable. Establish a solid connection with the ground by shifting your weight distribution so that it is equally divided between the base of your big toes, the base of your little toes, and both left and right sides of your heels.

- From there, raise your right knee toward your belly button. Reach your

right arm inside your thigh and grasp the outer edge of your right foot. Tense your left front thigh muscles and move your outer thighs toward you

- Breathe in and stretch your right leg forward until your knee is as straight as possible. If you can, move your leg out to the side while taking steady breaths for 30 seconds. Breathe in, then smoothly reverse the process, moving your leg back forward as you exhale and flex your knee. Breathe in again and lower your foot to the ground as you exhale.

- Repeat this process with the left leg and arm.

The Chair

Focus: Legs
Level: Beginner
Total Time: 60 seconds
Indications: flat feet; Energize heart, diaphragm, intestines
Contraindications: recent injury to shoulders, back, hip, knees

The Chair The chair pose strengthens your calves, ankles, thighs, and spine while stretching your chest and shoulders. It is great for treating flat feet and can energize your heart, abdominal organs, and diaphragm. I suggest you stand near a wall, in case you need balance support.

- Begin by standing in mountain pose. Stand tall and straight with your feet separated enough to feel stable. Establish a solid connection with the ground by shifting your weight distribution so that it is equally divided between the base of your big toes, the base of your little toes, and both left and right sides of your heels.

- Breathe in and extend your arms to your sides. When your arms are straight out, turn your palms up and continue to raise your arms until they are straight up.

- Breathe out and bend your knees until your thighs are as close as possible to the horizontal. This will occur when your chest creates a right angle to your thighs while pressing your heels firmly into the ground.

- Keep your shoulder blades slightly rigid and elongate your lower back by moving your tailbone down and in. Hold this position for 30 to 60 seconds. Breathe in, raise your arms and straighten your knees.

- Breathe out and return to the mountain pose. Stand tall and straight with your feet separated enough to feel stable. Establish a solid connection with the ground by shifting your weight distribution so that it is equally divided between the base of your big toes, the base of your little toes, and both left and right sides of your heels.

The Tree

Focus: Lower legs
Level: Beginner
Total Time: 30 to 60 seconds
Indications: flat feet, sciatica
Contraindications: Headaches, low blood pressure, insomnia; modification for high blood pressure

The Tree

The Tree builds strength in your lower legs, specifically your ankles, thighs and calves, as well as your spine. It also stretches your shoulders, chest, inner thighs and groin. The tree pose can improve your balance and relieve flat feet. It is a great first standing pose to master as it prepares your body to tackle the more challenging standing poses.

Beginners may find it difficult to keep their foot from sliding down their leg at first. You can help this by bracing your knee against a wall until your balance is more firmly established. If you suffer from headaches, low blood pressure or insomnia you should avoid this pose. If you suffer from high blood pressure, just don't lift your arms over your head.

- Begin by standing in the mountain pose. Stand tall and straight with your feet separated enough to feel stable. Establish a solid connection with the ground by shifting your weight distribution so that it is equally divided between the base of your big toes, the base of your little toes, and both left and right sides of your heels.

- Drive your inner left foot firmly into the ground, shifting your weight to your left side. When your balance is established on your left leg, bend your right knee, reach your right hand down, and grasp your right ankle.

- Raise your right foot up the opposite leg, placing the sole against your left thigh. If you are able to flex your leg far enough, push your heel into the left side of your groin and keep your toes pointing downward toward the ground. Your abdomen should be centered over your left foot.

- Your pelvis should be in a neutral position, even and neither tilted forward nor backward. Place your hands on the top of your pelvis. Elongate your tailbone into the ground. Press the sole of your right foot into your left thigh and resist with opposing force from your left leg. Press your hands together in the form of a Salutation Seal and stare straight ahead.

- Stay in this position for 30 to 60 seconds.

- Breathe out and return your right foot to the ground, assuming mountain pose. Stand tall and straight with your feet separated enough to feel stable. Establish a solid connection with the ground by shifting your weight distribution so that it is equally divided between the base of your big toes, the base of your little toes, and both left and right sides of your heels. Breathe in slowly, allowing your chest to expand fully, then breathe out even more slowly.

- Repeat the process for your left foot

The Easy

Focus: Knees, Ankles, spine
Level: Beginner
Total Time: Variable
Indications: calm the mind
Contraindications: knee or hip injury

The Easy

The easy pose focuses on your lower legs, specifically your knees and ankles, while simultaneously strengthening your back. It has also been found to calm the brain. Beginners may find it helpful to use the aid of a yoga block for this pose by sitting near a wall and placing the block in the space between your shoulder blades and the wall. You'll also need a thick sheet or blanket for this pose.

- Fold a blanket into a mode of support that is a few inches thick. Sit down cross-legged and place the blanket under your hips.

- Place your hands, palms downward, atop your thighs as you turn both thighs slightly inward and press them down into the ground. Sustain this for two full breaths.

- Continue to sustain this as you place your thumbs under the edge of your armpits and let the upward force lift your entire torso until your head is straight above your heart, which is itself directly above your hips.

- Place the tops of your calves over one another, expand your knees, place each foot behind its opposite knee, and gather your legs toward your body.

- Rest the edges of your feet on the ground and make sure your inner arches are against your lower shins. Your shins and thighs should create a triangular shape with a space between your feet and your abdomen. Ensure that your abdomen is in a relaxed position. Rest your hands on your knees and elongate your tailbone toward the ground. Tense your shoulder blades, pulling them toward your spine without arching your back.

- Stay in this position for as long as you'd like. If you plan on regularly performing this pose I recommend alternating the way you cross your shins (i.e. Right over left then left over right next time)

The Extended Triangle

Focus: Lower Legs
Level: Intermediate
Total Time: 30 to 60 seconds
Indications: digestion, backache (especially if pregnant)
Contraindications: diarrhea, headache, low blood pressure

The Extended Triangle

The Extended Triangle helps you stretch and build strength in your ankles, knees and thighs while energizing your abdominal organs. It can also stretch your shoulders, spine, chest, hamstrings, hips, calves and groin. The extended triangle can help enhance your body's digestion and can aid in the relief of a backache, especially for pregnant women. Beginners may find it helpful to perform this pose against a wall for balance support.

You can use the extended triangle as preparation for twisting poses or forward bends. If you suffer from diarrhea, headaches or low blood pressure you should avoid this pose. If you have balance concerns, don't hesitate to keep a wall behind you for support. If you suffer from high blood pressure, make sure that you gaze down at the ground in the final position. If you experience neck problems, keep your gaze straight ahead instead of looking up.

- Begin by standing in mountain pose. Stand tall and straight with your feet separated enough to feel stable. Establish a solid connection with the ground by shifting your weight distribution so that it is equally divided between the base of your big toes, the base of your little toes, and both left and right sides of your heels. Breathe deeply and fully, in, and then even more slowly out.

- Breathe in again. Breathe out and separate your feet until they are three feet apart. Stretch your arms out to your sides, keeping your shoulder blades broad, your chest high, and your palms facing the ground.

- Turn your left foot slightly to the right. Rotate your right leg out from your hip until your foot is at a 90-degree angle to your torso. Make sure the soles of your feet are firmly connected to the ground on the left and right sides of your toes and your heels.

- Your right kneecap should be in line with the middle of your right ankle. Breathe out and stretch your body over your right leg while taking care to bend at your hips and not your waist. As you do this, simultaneously press your left heel into the ground. Pivot your torso slightly to the right, keeping its length evenly distributed. Allow your left hip to move forward slightly and allow your tailbone to elongate toward your left heel.

- Place your right hand on your lower leg, ankle, or the ground, depending on your comfort level and ability to keep the sides of your body even. Reach your left arm straight into the sky and align it with the tops of your shoulders. You can let your head remain in place or you can turn it to the left and gaze toward your left hand.

- Stay in this position for 30 to 60 seconds.

- To release yourself from this pose, breathe in, and raise your torso,

returning to mountain pose: Stand tall and straight with your feet separated enough to feel stable. Establish a solid connection with the ground by shifting your weight distribution so that it is equally divided between the base of your big toes, the base of your little toes, and both left and right sides of your heels.

- Repeat the process, this time leaning to the left.

The Lord of The Dance

Focus: Ankles
Level: Advanced
Total Time: 10-30 seconds
Indications: Balance, shoulders, chest, groin, abdomen
Contraindications: injury to ankle, arm, elbow, knee, low back

The Lord of The Dance

The lord of the dance focuses on building strength in your ankles and legs while simultaneously stretching your chest, shoulders, abdomen, thighs and groin. It can help improve your balance. Beginners to this pose may find it difficult to balance themselves; don't hesitate to seek out the aid of a wall for extra support. Often, a light touch on a stable surface can trick your body into thinking it has another solid point of contact, enabling you to sustain your balance more easily.

- Begin by standing in mountain pose. Stand tall and straight with your feet separated enough to feel stable. Establish a solid connection with the ground by shifting your weight distribution so that it is equally divided between the base of your big toes, the base of your little toes, and both left and right sides of your heels.

- Breathe in, balance yourself on your right foot and lift your left foot off

the ground by bending your knee and raising your foot toward your rear. Press the top of your right thigh back into your hip joint and raise your kneecap.

- While keeping your body upright, reach behind your body and grab hold of your outer foot with your left hand. At the same time, raise your pubis toward your abdomen and lower your tailbone toward the ground to avoid shortening your back.

- Start raising your left foot up and away from your body. Stretch your left thigh away from you until it's parallel to the ground. At the same time, extend your right arm in front of you, also parallel to the ground.

- Stay in this position for up to 30 seconds, breathing deeply and steadily.

- To release yourself from this pose, let go of your foot, bring it back to the ground.

- Return to mountain pose. Stand tall and straight with your feet separated enough to feel stable. Establish a solid connection with the ground by shifting your weight distribution so that it is equally divided between the base of your big toes, the base of your little toes, and both left and right sides of your heels.

- Repeat the process on your right foot.

The Extended Side Angle

Focus: Ankles and Knees
Level: Intermediate
Total Time: 60 seconds
Indications: menstrual pains and infertility (women), constipation, sciatica
Contraindications: blood pressure (high or low), insomnia, headache, modification for neck injury

The Extended Side Angle

The extended side angle focuses on building strength and stretching your legs but can also bring therapeutic benefits to your back. For women, this pose can relieve menstrual pains and infertility. It can open your chest, abdomen, shoulders and lungs. Beginners may find it helpful to perform this pose with the extended foot up against a wall to prevent sliding. If you suffer from blood pressure problems, insomnia or headaches you should avoid the extended side angle. If you suffer from neck problems or neck injury you should avoid turning your head upwards; instead, look straight ahead or down at the ground.

- Begin in mountain pose. Stand tall and straight, this time with your feet separated by about three feet. Establish a solid connection with the ground by shifting your weight distribution so that it is equally divided between the base of your big toes, the base of your little toes, and both left and right sides of your heels.

- Raise your arms out to your sides with your palms facing down; reach straight out through the tips of your fingers, keeping your shoulders broad and low.

- Turn your left foot slightly to the right and turn your right foot out 90 degrees, even as you rotate your right leg outward until the top or your knee is straight out toward your right toes. Roll your left hip a little bit to the right, but keep your torso straight ahead.

- Press your left heel into the ground by raising your inner left groin into your abdomen. Breathe out and bend your right knee over your right ankle. Let your knee extend toward your toes but never beyond them.

- Keep your chest open and your shoulders back. Reach your left arm toward the sky with your palm facing to the right. Tuck your hips slightly under you.

- Elongate the entire left side of your body to stretch from your left heel all the way up to your fingertips. Keeping your left heel on the ground, breathe out as you stretch to the right, reaching with the tips of your left fingers. Let your right arm relax straight downward, lowering in front of your right leg.

- Let your left side continue to stretch to the right, lowering your torso toward your right thigh. Keep your hips tucked under and the tops of your shoulders vertical. Resist the tendency to turn your left shoulder forward by pressing the back of your right arm against your thigh. Stretch as far as your body will take you without turning. If your right hand can reach the floor, press your fingertips down, just beside your right instep.

- Continue to stretch out your left side for several breaths. Then, breathe in, push up with your right hand on your thigh as you straighten your right leg and raise your torso back up, letting your arms lower to your sides

- Return to mountain pose. Stand tall and straight with your feet separated enough to feel stable. Establish a solid connection with the ground by shifting your weight distribution so that it is equally divided between the base of your big toes, the base of your little toes, and both left and right

sides of your heels.

- Repeat this entire process, this time stretching to your left side.

The Revolved Side Angle

Focus: Knees, Ankles
Level: Intermediate
Total Time: 30-60 seconds
Indications: digestion, infertility
Contraindications: blood pressure (high or low), insomnia, headaches

The Revolved Side Angle

The Revolved Side Angle focuses on building strength in your knees and ankles while stretching your shoulders, chest, lungs, spine and groin. It can energize your abdominal organs and improve your digestion, stamina and balance. Many people believe that the revolved side angle can aid in recovering from constipation, backache, osteoporosis, and infertility. Those who have ever experienced blood pressure problems, insomnia, or who have a headache should avoid this pose. If you are prone to neck problems, look ahead or down at the ground instead of looking up.

- Begin by standing in mountain pose. Stand tall and straight with your feet separated enough to feel stable. Establish a solid connection with the ground by shifting your weight distribution so that it is equally divided between the base of your big toes, the base of your little toes, and both left and right sides of your heels. Breathe deeply.

- Breathe out, placing your hands on your hips, and stepping back with

your left leg into a lunge. Position your right foot at a 45-degree angle to the right and point your left foot slightly to the right. Align your heels, tense your thighs and rotate your right thigh slightly outward. The middle of your kneecap should be directly over your right ankle, not tilted in or out.

- Breathe out and rotate your torso to the right until you are looking over your right leg. As you do this, raise your left heel and rotate on the ball of your foot until the inside of your foot is parallel to the inside of your right foot. Inhale slowly.

- Breathe out and bend your right knee until your thigh is parallel to the ground. Your right shin should be vertical at this point, with your knee directly above your heel. At the same time, press your left thigh toward the sky and stretch deeply through your left heel while tucking in your tailbone.

- Breathe out again, twist your torso further to the right and lower your left shoulder toward your right leg. Lower your left arm to the right of your leg, using the pressure of your arm against your thigh to help twist your shoulders further. Pull your shoulder blades down and back. The objective is to lower your left arm all the way to where it meets the shoulder, but listen to your body. You may feel discomfort, but you should never feel pain.

- Continue to stretch your torso for several breaths.

- To release yourself from this pose, breathe in, raise your torso up as you exhale.

- Return to mountain pose. Stand tall and straight with your feet separated enough to feel stable. Establish a solid connection with the ground by shifting your weight distribution so that it is equally divided between the base of your big toes, the base of your little toes, and both left and right sides of your heels.

- After resting in mountain pose for a few slow, full breaths, repeat the process, this time bending over your left leg.

Legs Up The Wall

Focus: Legs and Feet
Level: Beginner
Total Time: Up to 15 minutes
Indications: digestion, blood pressure, respiration
Contraindications: eye injury, back or neck problems

Legs Up The Wall

The legs up the wall pose focuses on stretching the backs of your legs and neck as well as the front of your body. It can treat cramped legs and feet while relieving minor backaches. Experts credit this pose with relieving a number of conditions including arthritis, blood pressure problems, sleeplessness, menstrual-related symptoms, headaches, and digestive/respiratory issues. There are contradictory beliefs regarding whether women experiencing menstruation should perform this pose. Consult with an experienced instructor if you have questions. Individuals with eye, back, or neck problems should avoid this pose entirely.

To perform the legs up the wall position, you will need a support like a thick folded blanket. You will also need a wall you can prop your legs up to.

- The first thing you'll need to do is figure out where and how to place your support. It is intended to raise your back off the ground beneath your waist. If you are very stiff, you may need less support, but place it further

away from the wall. The more flexible your hips, legs, and back, the taller a support you can tolerate and the closer you can approach the wall. You will want to experiment until you figure out what is most comfortable for you.

- A good starting point is to place your support half a foot away from the wall. Sit alongside the edge of your support with the right side of your body touching the wall. Breathe out and roll on your hips until your shoulder meets the ground. Roll on your back to the right, lifting your legs up onto the wall. Your head and shoulders will rest lightly on the ground and the arch in your back will be supported firmly. If your body moves off the support, you can modify its position to prevent this.

- Your hips will lie in the space between the support and the wall. Raise your head and let it sink straight down, making your neck a straight extension from your back. Inhale and allow your chest to rise and your ribs to expand. Let your shoulder blades separate to either direction away from your spine and let your arms and hands rest on the ground straight out from your sides.

- Slightly tense your legs to help keep them in place along the wall. Let the tops of your thighs relax. Turn your gaze toward your heart.

- Remain in this position for five minutes, breathing deeply and steadily. Over time you will be able to work your way up to a full 15 minutes in this pose.

- To release, move your body off the support by rolling onto your right side, lowering your legs to the ground. Remain on your side for a breath before inhaling as you sit back up. Use your arms to push your torso into a sitting position, with your left leg along the wall.

The High (Crescent) Lunge

Focus: Legs, Arms
Level: Beginner
Total Time: N/A
Indications: sciatica, digestion
Contraindications: knee injury (caution), modification for neck injury

The High Lunge

The high lunge, also known as the straight-leg lunge or crescent lunge, helps build strength in your legs and arms while simultaneously stretching your groin. Experts credit this pose with successfully treating sciatica, constipation, and indigestion. If you have ever experienced a major knee injury then you should approach this pose with great caution. If you suffer from neck problems, you can modify the high lunge by looking at the ground instead of staring into the middle of the room.

- From a standing forward bend, bend your knees, breathe in and step your left foot behind you until you're able to make a right angle with your right foot and keep the ball of your left foot on the ground.

- Rest your body on your right thigh and elongate it forward as you stare straight ahead. At the same time, tense your left thigh and drive it up toward the sky while keeping your left knee stabilized above your heel (never stand with your knee ahead of its foot). Stretch your left leg by driving your left heel into the ground**.**

- Breathe out and return your right foot next to your left.
- Repeat this process, stepping back with your right foot.

The Garland

Focus: Legs
Level: Beginner
Total Time: 30 to 60 seconds
Indications: digestion, metabolism
Contraindications: injury to low back, ankle, knee or hip

The Garland

The garland pose helps stretch your groin, ankles and your back while toning your stomach. Beginners may find it helpful to sit on the edge of a chair instead of squatting. Your thighs and your upper body should create a 90-degree angle and the soles of your feet should be slightly forward of your knees.

- Begin by squatting with your feet together and your heels on the ground. Separate your thighs until they're beyond the width of your shoulders.

Breathe out, lean your torso forward until it is between your thighs.

- Push your elbows outward against the insides of your knees and bring your hands together in the salutation seal. Press your knees into your elbows to help elongate the front of your body. Press your inner thighs against your sides. Stretch your arms forward, move them to your sides and bend the fronts of your lower legs into your armpits. Push the tips of your fingers into the ground.

- Stay in this position for 30 to 60 seconds. Breathe in and release yourself by straightening your knees and standing into a standing forward bend pose.

The Revolved Triangle

Focus: Legs
Level: Intermediate
Total Time: 30 to 60 seconds
Indications: digestion, respiration, balance
Contraindications: back injury, migraines, low blood pressure, sleeplessness, diarrhea

The Revolved Triangle

The revolved triangle focuses on stretching and building strength throughout your legs. At the same time, it opens your spine and hips. It can improve and energize your breathing by opening up your chest and stimulating your abdominal organs. Experts believe the revolved triangle can help with constipation and sciatica, it can improve your digestion, help with back pain, and enhance your balance.

Beginners may find it helpful to approach this pose with a narrow stance and to use the help of a wall to secure their back heel in place. If you have ever had a spine or back injury you should avoid the revolved triangle. Individuals with migraines, low blood pressure, sleeplessness, headaches or diarrhea should also avoid this pose.

- Begin by standing in mountain pose. Stand tall and straight, this time with your feet about three feet apart. Establish a solid connection with the ground by shifting your weight distribution so that it is equally divided between the base of your big toes, the base of your little toes, and both left and right sides of your heels. Breathe deeply.

- Raise your arms parallel to the ground with your palms facing down. Stretch both arms out from your sides; this will widen your shoulder blades.

- Keeping your legs straight, pivot to the right on the balls of your feet; then plant your heels on the ground. To stabilize your balance, lift your toes and point your left foot slightly to the left. Lift the toes of your right foot and point your right foot slightly to the right.

- Breathe out again, twisting your body even more to the right and bring your torso down over your front leg. Place your left hand on the ground on either side of your foot. Let your left hip lean down toward the ground. If your right hip rises up toward your shoulder when you do this, press the outside of your right thigh to the left; this should shift your hip away from your shoulder. If needed, you can push your right thumb into your hip to help your body move correctly.

- Newcomers to this pose should keep the head steady and look ahead or down to the ground. More experienced individuals can turn their heads to gaze at their thumb.

- Press your arms away from your body using force through the middle of your back. Bear your body weight on your heels and on your front hand.

- Stay in this position for 30 to 60 seconds. Breathe out, release your body

from the twist, breathe in and move your body up.

- Repeat this process, this time pivoting to your left.

The Warrior

Focus: Lower Legs
Level: Beginner
Total Time: 30 to 60 seconds
Indications: sciatica, circulation, respiration
Contraindications: high blood pressure, heart problems, modifications for shoulder injury, neck injury

The Warrior

The Warrior pose builds strength in your lower legs, arms, shoulders and back muscles while stretching your groin, stomach, lungs, chest, shoulders, and neck. It is a great warm up before tackling other poses that involve a backbend. The warrior is great for treating sciatica.

Beginners may find it helpful to raise their back heel on a block to help stay grounded in this pose. If you experience high blood pressure or have heart problems, you should avoid this pose or consult with an experienced yoga

instructor before using it. Those who suffer from shoulder complications should keep their arms horizontal throughout. If you suffer from neck complications you should keep your neck straight and avoid looking up.

- Begin by standing in mountain pose. Breathe out and step forward with your right leg, planting your foot about three feet ahead of the left leg, with your right knee bent and your left heel planted on the ground.

- Point your left toes slightly to the left and your right toes slightly to the right. This will help stabilize your balance.

- Raise your right arm toward the sky with your palm facing to the left. Pull your shoulder blades together and down.

- Keeping your left heel pushed into the ground, breathe out and bend your right knee over your right ankle until your shin is perpendicular to the ground. Stretch through your arms and raise your rib cage away from your abdomen. With this movement, you should feel your chest, stomach and the back of your arms and legs rise up. You can keep your head in place and stare straight ahead or you can turn your neck at gaze up at your right hand.

- Stay in this position for 30 to 60 seconds.

- To release yourself from this pose, press your heels into the ground and straighten your right knee while actively stretching your right arm up and pulling it back. Step back, bringing your right leg back beside the right hand. Both feet should be turned straight forward.

- Take a couple of breaths and then repeat, stepping forward with your left leg.

The Warrior 2

Focus: Ankles
Level: Beginner
Total Time: 30 to 60 seconds
Indications: backache, carpal tunnel syndrome, osteoporosis
Contraindications: diarrhea, high blood pressure, modification for neck injury

The Warrior 2

The Warrior 2 pose focuses on building strength in your legs and ankles while stretching your shoulders, chest, lungs and groin. It can energize your abdominal organs, improve your stamina, treat backache, and relieve pain caused by carpal tunnel syndrome, osteoporosis, and flat feet. Those who have problems with diarrhea or high blood pressure should avoid this pose. Those who suffer from neck problems should keep their neck aimed straight ahead rather than turning it in this pose.

- Begin by standing in mountain pose. Stand tall and straight with your feet separated enough to feel stable. Establish a solid connection with the ground by shifting your weight distribution so that it is equally divided between the base of your big toes, the base of your little toes, and both left and right sides of your heels.

- Raise your arms parallel to the ground and actively reach them out. Keep your shoulder blades broad and your palms facing the ground.

- Step forward on your left leg, planting your foot straight in front of you. Point your left foot slightly to the left and point the toes of your right foot at a 90-degree angle outward, to the right. Align your heels in a straight line under your body and tense your thighs to support your body. Rotate your left thigh slightly out so that the middle of your left kneecap is over your left ankle.

- Breathe out and bend your left knee until you approach a right angle with the ground. Straighten your right leg and press your right heel into the ground to anchor it. Extend your arms straight out from your shoulder blades while keeping your torso upright over your pelvis. Your left arm should be directly over your left leg while your right arm is above your right leg. Gently tuck your hips under. Rotate your head to the left and gaze out past your left hand.

- Stay in this position for 30 to 60 seconds.

- To release yourself from this pose, breathe in, step back until your feet are together and pointing straight ahead. Your arms will return to your sides.

- Repeat this process, this time stepping forward with your right leg.

The Reversed Warrior

Focus: Legs
Level: Intermediate
Total Time: 5 breaths
Indications: carpal tunnel syndrome, sciatica, flat feet osteoporosis
Contraindications: injury to hips, back, or shoulders, diarrhea, high blood pressure

The Reversed Warrior

The reversed warrior focuses on building strength in your legs while stretching your shoulders, groin and chest.

- Begin in the warrior 2 pose. Your right leg should be ahead of you with your knee bent.

- Raise your arms straight out to your sides with palms down. Then drop your left hand down and back to rest on the back of your leg.

- Raise your right hand into the sky and stretch your arm back over your head, keeping your legs stable. Stare up and back, following your right

arm with your eyes

- Exit this pose by straightening your torso and lowering your right hand to your side. Then step back, bringing your right leg back beside the left leg.

The Warrior 3

Focus: Ankles
Level: Intermediate
Total Time: 30 to 60 seconds
Indications: posture, balance, memory, concentration
Contraindications: high blood pressure, injury to legs, hip, back, or shoulder

The Warrior 3

The warrior 3 strengthens your legs and ankles as well as your back muscles and shoulders. It can enhance your posture and increase your balance. Experienced yogis often transition from warrior one to warrior three by extending their arms over their heads, breathing out and bringing their body toward their forward leg.

Beginners may find it difficult to balance on one foot; feel free to touch a wall with a hand or a shoulder to support your balance. If you have problems with high blood pressure, you should avoid this pose.

- Begin by standing in mountain pose. Stand tall and straight with your feet separated enough to feel stable. Establish a solid connection with the ground by shifting your weight distribution so that it is equally divided between the base of your big toes, the base of your little toes, and both left and right sides of your heels.

- Breathe out and fold your body into a standing forward bend. From there,

breathe out and step your left foot straight behind you into a deep lunge. Keep your right knee bent at a 90-degree angle. Rest the middle of your torso on the center of your right thigh and brace both sides of your right knee with both hands. Squeeze your hands into your knee, raise your torso slightly, breathe out and slightly turn it to the right.

- Extend your arms forward, keeping them parallel to the ground with palms facing. Breathe out and press the top of your right thigh backward, pushing the heel of your right foot into the ground. Straighten your left leg and raise your right leg straight behind you at the same time. Press your tailbone into your pelvis to create resistance as you raise your back leg.

- Shift your body forward by transferring most of your body weight onto the ball of your left foot. Straighten your left knee to anchor the heel of your left foot firmly. At this point, your body, arms and raised leg should be parallel to the ground. If your abdomen is tilted, release the hip of your raised leg downward until your hip points are even. Extend your back leg behind you, as you reach forward with your arm. Raise your head slightly and gaze forward without crimping the back of your neck.

- Stay in this pose for 30 to 60 seconds. To release yourself from this pose, breathe out and come out of the lunge. Place your hands beside your right foot. Breathe out; bring your left foot forward until it is parallel with the right and you've returned to a forward bend.

- Stay in the forward bend for a few breaths and then repeat the process with your left leg extended behind you.

The Lotus

Focus: Ankles and Knees
Level: Advanced
Total Time: 5 seconds
Indications: stimulate bladder, digestion, lowers blood pressure
Contraindications: knee injury, ankle injury

The Lotus

The lotus stretches your knees and ankles while energizing your abdomen, bladder, and spine. Individuals with a knee or ankle injury should avoid this pose.

Before you attempt the lotus, you should be able to perform comfortably each of the following:

- The bound angle (See Chapter 7).
- The revolved head to knee.

- The pigeon (See Chapter 11).

- The cow face (See Chapter 5).

- The half-lotus.

This pose is not for beginners; it is more difficult than it looks. However, many intermediate to advanced practitioners find this position helpful for clearing the mind.

- Begin by sitting in the staff position, with your torso tall and your straight legs pointing out in front of you.

- The key to performing the lotus safely is to open up your hip joints. Start by rotating your right thigh outward from the hip socket and bending your knee, closing it completely. This will help to protect your knee from injury.

- Place your right hand underneath the right knee and with your left hand hold your right foot. Keeping your knee and foot the same distance from the floor, Lift the lower leg with your hands and move it over until your right foot is atop your left hip.

- Rotate your left hip out and draw your left foot as close to your body as possible. Keeping your left knee and foot the same distance from the floor, lift the leg with your hands and slowly and smoothly bring it up toward your body, placing your left foot atop your right hip.

- At first, only hold this position for a few seconds before releasing first your left foot and then your right foot, returning to the staff position.

- With repeated practice over a span of weeks, you will be able to sustain the lotus position for a full minute with ease.

Chapter 5 : Yoga For The Arms and Shoulders

The Gate

Focus: Shoulders
Level: Beginner
Total Time: 30 to 60 seconds
Indications: energizes lungs and abdomen
Contraindications: modification for knee injury

The Gate

The gate focuses on opening your shoulders while simultaneously stretching your spine, hamstrings and the sides of your body. It also energizes your lungs and abdominal organs. Individuals with a knee injury should perform this pose while sitting on a chair.

- Begin by kneeling on the ground. Straighten your right leg, extending it

out to the right and press your foot, both toes and heel, against the ground. Your right knee and ankle should be facing straight up, aligned with the top of your leg. Slightly rotate your abdomen to the right while moving your upper body to the left.

- Breathe in and extend your arms out to your sides. Bend your body over your right leg and rest your right hand as far down your leg as possible. The right side of your torso will be compressed while you will be stretching the left side.

- Place your left hand on your left hip and push your abdomen down into the ground. Move your left hand to your lower left rib cage and push it up toward your shoulders.

- Inhale as you stretch your left arm over your head to the right. Allow your left hip to slightly roll forward but stretch your upper body away from the ground.

- Stay in this position for 30 to 60 seconds. To release yourself from this pose, breathe in and raise your torso back up straight through your top arm. Return your right leg to its original position.

- Rest a moment, then repeat the process to the left.

The Handstand

Focus: Shoulders
Level: Advanced
Total Time: 10 seconds or longer, depending on experience level
Indications: depression, anxiety
Contraindications: neck, back, or shoulder injury, headaches, high blood pressure, heart problems, pregnancy

The Forearm Stand

The forearm stand is the prerequisite to holding a handstand. It builds strength in your shoulders, wrists and arms while stretching your stomach. A forearm stand can enhance your balance and is believed to be effective in treating depression

and anxiety. If you have ever experienced a neck, back or shoulder injury, you should avoid this pose. Likewise, individuals who suffer from headaches, high blood pressure, heart conditions and who are menstruating should approach with caution. Pregnant women should forego this pose entirely.

The forearm stand is an advanced inversion. It requires serious strength in your hands, arms and shoulders. Before you take it on, you should be able to perform the following:

- Downward-facing dog.
- Dolphin plank.
- Crow.
- Headstand.
- Eight-angle pose.
- Firefly.

Once you have mastered the above poses, you should have the strength to tackle the forearm stand.

- Start from the downward-facing dog. Stand on your hands and knees with your shoulders directly above your hands and your hips above your knees. Press your hips straight up until both legs and arms are straight. Let your neck continue the straight line of your back from hips to head. Breathe deeply and slowly.
- Lower your forearms to the ground. Splay your fingers apart and press them into the ground. You will use your fingers to provide balance when you go into the handstand, so begin to use them now. Tighten your shoulder blades, pulling them together and then toward your tailbone.
- Step your left leg forward, bending your left knee and flexing your right foot. Push up to raise your hips and torso until your torso is straight above your shoulders.

- Raise your legs until they are straight and vertical, in line with the rest of your body.

- Enlist in your core stomach muscles to help keep your hips over your shoulders. If your groin or armpits feel stiff, you can elongate your lower back by pulling the front of your ribs into your body and stretching your tailbone into the soles of your feet.

- Press your legs together and rotate your thighs inward. Allow your head to hang between your shoulders and stare straight ahead.

- Stay in this position for 10 seconds at first. Over time, you can work your way up to a maximum of 60 seconds. Continue to breathe deeply, slowly, and steadily, as you maintain this pose.

- To release this position, breathe out and lower first one leg, then the other. Keep your chest raised and your shoulder blades separated as you bring down your legs.

- Stand in a forward bend for 30 seconds before you slowly raise your torso to an upright position, one vertebra at a time.

- If you cannot get yourself completely upside down, that's okay. Continue to practice the strength-building poses that will eventually provide you with enough power to support and balance your body.

The Firefly

Focus: Arms
Level: Advanced
Total Time: 15 to 30 seconds
Indications: stress, anxiety
Contraindications: injury to shoulder, wrist, elbow, lower back

The Firefly

The firefly helps build strength in your arms and wrists while stretching your groin and the back. It can also tone your stomach and enhance your balance. If you suffer from shoulder, wrist, elbow or lower back injuries then you should avoid this pose. Beginners can make this pose easier by sitting on the ground, positioning your legs at 90-degree angles and using yoga blocks to raise each heel.

- Begin by squatting with your feet a little less than shoulder width apart. Tilt your abdomen forward and bend your torso down to hang between your legs. Keeping your body low, bend your legs until your abdomen is level with your knees.

- Move your left upper arm and shoulder as far as you can under your left thigh above your knee, placing your hand just to the outside of your foot. Your fingers should point forward. Do the same with your right upper arm.

- Raise your body off the ground, by shifting your center of gravity. Push your hands into the ground and gently roll your weight off your feet onto your hands. Your inner thighs should remain as high up your arms as possible.

- Inhale, extend your legs to the sides as straight as possible while keeping your abdomen high, so that your legs are parallel to the ground. Push through the bottom of your big toes while pulling and spreading your toes toward your body. Tilt the inner edges of your feet forward slightly while keeping the outer edges back.

- Straighten your arms and widen your shoulder blades to hollow your chest. Raise your head and look into the distance. Take slow breaths and stay in this position for 15 to 30 seconds. Then, release your feet to the ground as you exhale.

The Dolphin Plank

Focus: Arms
Level: Beginner
Total Time: 30 to 60 seconds
Indications: concentration
Contraindications: carpal tunnel syndrome, shoulder injury

The Dolphin Plank

The dolphin plank builds strength in your shoulders, neck, and spine while strengthening your core. Individuals with carpal tunnel syndrome or shoulder injuries should avoid this pose. The dolphin plank differs from the straight plank, in that the forearms rest on the ground, whereas in the regular plank, your upper body is supported by your hands and wrists and your arms are straight.

- Begin in downward-facing dog. Start on your hands and knees with your shoulders directly above your hands and your hips above your knees. Press your hips straight up until both legs and arms are straight. Let your neck continue the straight line of your back from hips to head. Breathe deeply and slowly.

- Breathe in and pull your body forward until your shoulders are directly above your wrists. This should bring your body parallel to the ground with your arms perpendicular to it.

- Press the outsides of your arms in and forcefully press the underside of your index fingers into the ground. Lower your elbows to the ground. Tense your shoulders, contracting them together and then expanding them away from your spine. At the same time, expand your collarbone from your chest.

- Press the front of your thighs upward while allowing your tailbone to resist the ground as it naturally elongates down toward the soles of your feet. Lift your head until the back of your neck is parallel to the ground and gaze straight downward. Stay in this position for 30 to 60 seconds.

The Upward Plank

Focus: Arms and Wrists
Level: Intermediate
Total Time: 30 seconds
Indications: thyroid, abdominal organ function
Contraindications: wrist injury, modification for neck injury

The Upward Plank

The upward plank builds strength in your arms and wrists as well as your legs while stretching your ankles, shoulders, and chest. Anyone who has experienced a wrist injury should avoid this pose. Individuals who have experienced a neck injury should use a wall or chair seat to support their neck in this pose.

- Begin by sitting in the staff pose: Sit down on the ground and stretch your legs straight forward, flexing your ankles and bending your toes back toward your torso, which is straight and tall.

- Place your hands lightly atop your thighs, palms downward, as you shift them slightly inward and press them into the ground. Breathe deeply in, then slowly out.

- Continue to sustain slow, full breathing as you place your thumbs under the edge of your armpits and let the upward force lift your entire torso until your head is straight above your heart, which is directly above your hips.

- Sustaining this tall torso, lower your arms to your sides, touching the

ground with your fingertips to steady your posture and balance.

- Remain in this position as long as you want.

- Place your hands a few inches behind your hips and point your fingers forward. Bend your knees to plant your feet on the ground with your heels about 12 inches away from your hips; then rotate your big toes inward.

- Breathe out, press your hands and the insides of your feet into the ground and raise your hips until your body and thighs are parallel to the ground and your arms and shins are perpendicular.

- While keeping your hips in place, straighten out your right leg followed by your left leg. Raise your hips a little higher without causing your hips to firm. Raise your chest while pressing your shoulder blades together across your back.

- Gently tip your head backward without shortening your neck. Stay in this position for 30 seconds.

- To release, breathe out and lower yourself back into the staff pose. Stretch your legs straight forward, flexing your ankles and bending your toes back toward your torso, which is suspended by an invisible string that runs up to the stars.

The Extended Side Angle

Focus: Shoulders
Level: Beginner
Total Time: 30 to 60 seconds
Indications: backaches, constipation, menstrual symptoms
Contraindications: blood pressure (high or low), headache, insomnia

The Extended Side Angle

The extended side angle builds strength in your shoulders while stretching them, along with your chest, upper back, lower legs, and neck. It is therapeutic for backaches, constipation and menstrual symptoms. Those who suffer from blood pressure problems, insomnia, or who are experiencing a headache should avoid the extended side angle.

- Begin by standing in the mountain pose. Stand tall and straight with your feet separated enough to feel stable. Establish a solid connection with the ground by shifting your weight so that it is equally divided between the base of your big toes, the base of your little toes, and both left and right sides of your heels.

- Breathe out and place your feet three feet apart from each other. Rotate

your left foot slightly to the left and turn your right foot right to a 90-degree angle. Both of the soles of your feet should be parallel to each other. Bring your arms up parallel to the ground and actively extend them out, keeping your palms facing the ground.

- Breathe in and stare over the tips of your right fingers. Breathe out and bend your right knee until your shin is perpendicular to the ground. Angle your body forward and place your right elbow on your right knee. Extend your left arm over your left ear with your palm still facing the ground.

- Press the outside of your left foot into the ground and open your left hip by reaching through your left arm. Stay in this position for 30 to 60 seconds.

- To release yourself from this pose, breathe in and raise your body back up to mountain pose. Stand tall and straight with your feet separated enough to feel stable. Establish a solid connection with the ground by Shifting your weight distribution so that it is equally divided between the base of your big toes, the base of your little toes, and both left and right sides of your heels.

- Repeat this process, this time with your right leg extended.

The Eagle

Focus: Shoulders
Level: Intermediate
Total Time: 15 to 30 seconds
Indications: focus, balance, asthma, sciatica, backache
Contraindications: knee injury

The Eagle

The eagle stretches your shoulders and upper back. Regular performance can

improve your focus and boost your balance. Experts credit the eagle pose with relieving symptoms of asthma, sciatica and backaches. Those who have knee injuries should not engage in this pose.

- Begin by standing in the mountain pose. Stand tall and straight with your feet separated enough to feel stable. Establish a solid connection with the ground by shifting your weight distribution so that it is equally divided between the base of your big toes, the base of your little toes, and both left and right sides of your heels.

- Bend your knees slightly. Raise your right foot off the ground and balance yourself on your left foot. Bring your right thigh over your left and hook your right foot behind your lower left leg. Stretch your arms out in front of you, crossing the right arm over the left and bending your elbows to bring your upper arms toward your body. Fold your left hand around your inner right wrist and push your palms into each other.

- Raise your arms until the lower arms are parallel to the ground. Draw your arms together while allowing your shoulders to drop slightly.

- Let your body weight sink into your left leg, stare straight ahead and breathe steadily. Remain in this position for 30 to 45 seconds.

- To release yourself from this pose, unwrap your legs followed by your arms and return to mountain pose. Stand tall and straight with your feet separated enough to feel stable. Establish a solid connection with the ground by shifting your weight distribution so that it is equally divided between the base of your big toes, the base of your little toes, and both left and right sides of your heels.

- Repeat the process, standing on your right foot and crossing the left arm over the right, even as you wrap the left foot over the right.

The Crow

Focus: Arms
Level: Intermediate
Total Time: 20 to 60 seconds
Indications: balance
Contraindications: carpal tunnel syndrome, pregnancy

The Crow

The crow strengthens your forearms and wrists as well as your pelvis while stretching your upper back and opening up your groin. It also helps to develop your core muscles and enhance your balance. Those who suffer from carpal tunnel syndrome or those who are pregnant should avoid this pose.

- Begin by standing in mountain pose. Stand tall and straight with your feet separated enough to feel stable. Establish a solid connection with the ground by shifting your weight distribution so that it is equally divided between the base of your big toes, the base of your little toes, and both left and right sides of your heels.

- Squat until you can place your hands flat on the ground, setting them

shoulder-width apart. Anchor your palms on the ground about 12 inches in front of your feet. Spread your fingers and press the top joints of each finger into the ground.

- Bend your elbows back, keeping them straight. Raise your body onto the balls of your feet and spread your knees open until they are aligned with your upper arms. Gently bring your knees into the backs of your upper arms and shift your body weight onto your hands, raising your head as you move forward.

- Support your body on bent toes. Raise one foot off the ground followed by the other. Pull your knees toward your midline and pull your feet toward your hips.

- Stay in this position for 20 to 60 seconds. To release yourself from this pose, shift your bodyweight back until both of your feet are back on the ground.

- Rise to stand in mountain pose. Stand tall and straight with your feet separated enough to feel stable. Establish a solid connection with the ground by shifting your weight distribution so that it is equally divided between the base of your big toes, the base of your little toes, and both left and right sides of your heels.

The Cow Face

Focus: Shoulders and Upper Arms
Level: Beginner
Total Time: 60 seconds
Indications: stress, anxiety, fatigue
Contraindications: neck injury, shoulder injury

The Cow Face

The cow face stretches your shoulders, triceps and armpits as well as your legs and chest. Those with severe neck or shoulder problems should avoid engaging in this pose.

- Begin in staff pose: Sit down on the ground and stretch your legs straight

forward, flexing your ankles and bending your toes back toward your torso, which is suspended straight and tall from your hips to the sky.

- Bend your knees so that your feet are flat on the ground. Set your left leg across your right thigh, setting the right foot, down on the outside of your right hip. Wrap your right leg over your left thigh, with your right knee on top of your left knee. Then, move your right foot to just outside of your left hip. Your hips should be even as they rest between the soles of your feet.

- Breathe in and extend your right arm in front of you. Turn your arm inward until your thumb points to the left and your palm faces up. Doing so will cause your upper back to round. Exhale as you move your arm behind your body and rest your forearm in the arch formed by your lower back, keeping the arm parallel to your waist. Push your shoulders down and gently move your hand up until your forearm is vertical. Keep your elbow against the right side of your body.

- Breathe in and extend your left arm in front of you. Rotate your hand until your palm faces the sky. Breathe out and raise your arm over your head. Stretch through your left fingers. Breathe out and bend your left elbow, placing your left hand behind your head to grasp your right hand, and interlacing your fingers if you can. If your hands cannot touch, hold a towel in your left hand and when you stretch it behind your back, grasp the other end of the towel with your right hand. Use this aid to stretch your arms. Over time, your arms will stretch further until you will be able to grasp your hands.

- Raise your left elbow and pull your right elbow toward the ground, pulling from the back of your armpit. Tense your shoulder blades across your back and raise your chest. Try to keep your left arm even with the left side of your head.

- Stay in this position for 60 seconds. Then, unhook your fingers, return your arms to your sides and unfold your legs.

- Repeat the process, reversing the direction of both arms and legs.

The Dolphin

Focus: Arms
Level: Beginner
Total Time: 3o to 60 seconds
Indications: osteoporosis, digestion, high blood pressure, sciatica, asthma
Contraindications: modification for neck injury, shoulder injury

The Dolphin

The dolphin strengthens your arms and legs, at the same time stretching your feet and shoulders. Regular performance can fend off the development of osteoporosis and may improve digestion. It can also provide relief for high blood pressure, sciatica, and asthma. If you have experienced a neck or shoulder injury, keep your knees bent throughout this pose.

- Begin by getting down on your hands and knees on the ground. Align your knees with your hips. Place your forearms flat on the ground with your wrists aligned with your shoulders. Clasp your hands together and firmly press your forearms into the ground.

- Flex your toes, breathe out, and lift first your heels, then your knees off the ground, straightening your legs until your knees are only slightly bent. Elongate your tailbone down from your abdomen and gently press it into your pubis. Raise your sitting bones into the air and draw your inner legs into your groin through your inner ankles.

- Tense your shoulder blades across your back, extend them out from your

spine, and press them down toward your tailbone. Keep your head stationary between your upper arms without letting it droop.

- If you have never incurred a neck or shoulder injury, you can straighten your knees at this point. If your upper back naturally rounds, you do not have to straighten it. Actively elongate your tailbone and raise the top of your chest away from the ground.

- Remain in this position for 30 to 60 seconds. To release yourself from this pose, breathe out and lower your knees to the ground.

The Eight Angle

Focus: Arms
Level: Advanced
Total Time: 30 to 60 seconds
Indications: abdominal organs
Contraindications: shoulder, wrist, or elbow injury

The Eight Angle

The eight angle pose focuses on building strength in your arms and wrists. It is a great position to take on after mastering the standing forward bend, bound angle, four limbed staff, and extended side angle poses. Individuals with shoulder, wrist or elbow injuries should not perform this pose.

- Begin by standing in mountain pose. Stand tall and straight with your feet separated a little farther than hip width. Establish a solid connection with the ground by shifting your weight distribution so that it is equally divided between the base of your big toes, the base of your little toes, and both left and right sides of your heels.

- Breathe out and transition into a standing forward bend. Place your hands on the ground beside your feet.

- Bend your knees slightly and place your right arm inside and then behind your right leg. Press your hand into the ground near your right foot. Slowly move your right arm across the back of your right knee until your knee is up and behind your right shoulder.

- Support your shoulder with your knee and move your left foot to hook your left ankle over your right. Slightly angle your body to the left, shifting more weight onto your left arm.

- Gradually, raise your feet off the ground. Breathe out and bend your elbows. Angle your torso forward and let it descend until it is parallel to the ground. Simultaneously let your knees straighten as you stretch your now-straight legs to the right, also parallel to the ground.

- Press your upper right arm in between your thighs. With the aid of the pressure in your upper arm, rotate your body to the left while keeping your elbows closely tucked in. Stare at the ground as you do this.

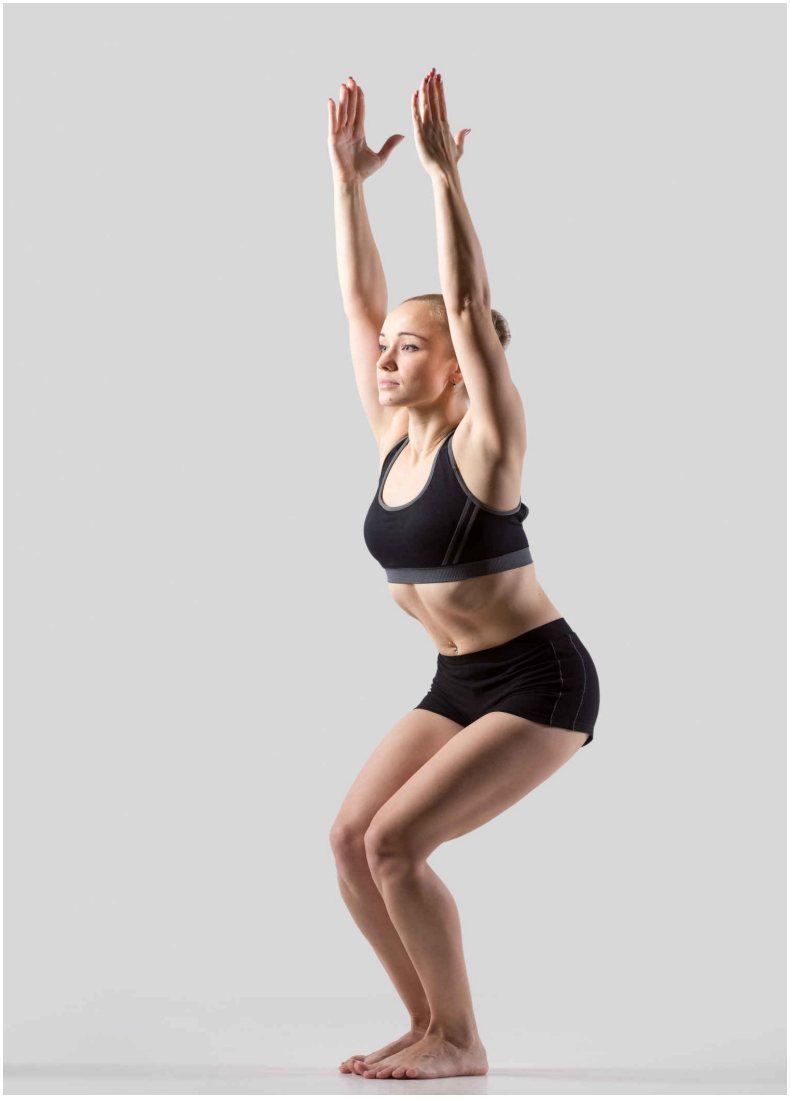
- Remain in this position for 30 to 60 seconds.

- To release yourself from this position, gently straighten your arms, raise your torso back up, bend your knees, disconnect your ankles, and set your feet back on the ground. Step back into a standing forward bend and rest for a couple of minutes.

- Repeat this process to the left side

The Chair

Focus: Shoulders
Level: Beginner
Total Time: 30 to 60 seconds
Indications: diaphragm, heart
Contraindications: low blood pressure, insomnia, headaches



The Chair

The chair will stretch your chest and shoulders while simultaneously strengthening your spine and legs. It is also good for your diaphragm and heart. The chair makes a great precursor to the mountain pose or any standing forward bend pose. Those who suffer ongoing low blood pressure, chronic insomnia, or

frequent headaches should avoid this one.

- Begin by standing in mountain pose. Stand tall and straight with your feet separated enough to feel stable. Establish a solid connection with the ground by shifting your weight distribution so that it is equally divided between the base of your big toes, the base of your little toes, and both left and right sides of your heels.

- Breathe in and raise your arms straight forward with your palms facing, shoulder-width apart.

- Breathe out as you bend your knees forward to lower your torso while simultaneously raising your arms straight overhead. You want to approach the horizontal with your thighs. Your knees should be above your toes, but never beyond them, and your upper body will lean slightly forward for balance, but you should attempt to keep it as straight as possible. Press the tops of your thighs down into the soles of your feet.

- Tense your shoulder blades across your back and elongate your tailbone toward the ground and into your pubis.

- Remain in this position for 30 to 60 seconds, breathing deliberately.

- To release yourself from this position, breathe in and straighten your knees as you stretch up through your arms. Breathe out and lower your arms to your sides, returning to mountain pose. Stand tall and straight with your feet separated enough to feel stable. Establish a solid connection with the ground by shifting your weight distribution so that it is equally divided between the base of your big toes, the base of your little toes, and both left and right sides of your heels.

The Half Gate

Focus: Shoulders/Sides
Level: Beginner
Total Time: 30 to 60 seconds
Indications: stimulates lungs, kidneys, liver
Contraindications: knee injury

The half gate pose focuses on opening your shoulders while simultaneously stretching your hamstrings. It can stimulate your lungs and abdominal organs. If you have a knee injury, you should avoid this pose, because it involves standing on one knee.

- Begin by kneeling on the ground.

- Raise your right leg and straighten it out to the right, placing your foot on the ground. Aim your right kneecap straight up by rotating your right leg so that your right heel is on the ground and your toes are pointing away from your body. If you can't get your toes onto the floor, place them atop a block or brace your right foot against a wall.

- Check to ensure that your hips are level.

- Raise your arms out to your sides with your palms down. Inhale and let your chest expand. Keep your shoulders relaxed and slightly back as you slowly exhale, keeping your chest opened up. Inhale again as you lower your right arm to rest your hand on the top of your right thigh, then raise and rotate your arm to reach straight up to the stars.

- Breathe and feel the stretch in your hamstrings and up your torso to your left fingertips.

- To release yourself from this pose, lower your arms to your sides and return your right leg to its original position.

- Release those muscles by coming down on all fours; then lower your hips and let your upper body melt over your legs into a child's pose. Rest here

as you breathe in deeply, and then out slowly. Take several breaths before you raise back up onto all fours and prepare to repeat the process to the other side.

The Noose

Focus: Shoulders and Chest
Level: Intermediate
Total Time: 30 to 60 seconds
Indications: indigestion, asthma, menstrual symptoms
Contraindications: knee injury, back injury, herniated disk

The Noose

The noose is a complex position that focuses on opening your shoulders and chest while simultaneously stretching your thighs, groin, and spine and building strength in your ankles. It can improve both posture and digestion while energizing your abdominal organs. Experts prefer the noose for relief of asthma, back tension, indigestion, gas, and menstrual symptoms. If you have a knee injury, back injury, or a herniated disk you should avoid this pose.

- Begin by standing to the left of a wall, an arm's length away, in mountain pose. Stand tall and straight with your feet hip-width. Establish a solid

connection with the ground by shifting your weight distribution so that it is equally divided between the base of your big toes, the base of your little toes, and both left and right sides of your heels.

- Rotate your torso to the right and press your right hand flat against the wall keeping your right arm parallel to the ground. Return your torso to its forward position and lower your arm.

- Sink down into a full squat until your hips meet your heels. Place your right arm out and touch the wall for balance.

- Stretch your knees to the left. Breathe out, rotate your torso to the right, and firmly place both of your hands on the wall. At this point, your left elbow should be touching the outside of your right knee. Support yourself on your right hand.

- Breathe in, slowly move the back of your left arm down your left leg so that your left shoulder moves toward your left knee, thus closing any open space on the left side of your torso. Exhale as you press your left shoulder against your left knee in order to elongate the left side of your body through your inner groin. Keep your stomach relaxed as you do this.

- Lower your right hand to your side. Continue to breathe steadily as you deepen the twist, letting your left hand touch the ground lightly for balance. When you are firmly balanced on all four points of each foot, bend and reach your arms behind your back and clasp your left wrist with your right hand.

- Stay in this position for 30 to 60 seconds. To release yourself from this pose, breathe out, unclasp your hands, and straighten your torso from the twist.

- Breathe in as you rise to mountain pose. Stand tall and straight. Establish a solid connection with the ground by shifting your weight distribution so that it is equally divided between the base of your big toes, the base of your little toes, and both left and right sides of your heels. Breathe in

deeply and slowly, then exhale even more slowly

- Repeat the process, this time stretching to the right.

The Peacock

Focus: Arms
Level: Advanced
Total Time: 10+ seconds, depending on experience level
Indications: circulation, gall bladder, pancreas, intestines, liver, kidneys
Contraindications: elbow injury, wrist injury

The Peacock

The peacock builds strength in your forearms and wrists while simultaneously strengthening your back and your legs. It is useful to perform the peacock prior to the downward-facing dog or the child's pose. Anyone with an elbow or wrist injury should forego this pose.

- Begin in the full lotus position. Sit tall, with your feet straight out in front of you. Rotate your right thigh outward from the hip and bend your knee. Keeping your right knee and foot the same distance from the floor, lift your lower leg with your hands and move it over until your right foot is atop your left hip. Rotate your left hip out and draw your left foot as close to your body as possible. Keeping your left knee and foot the same distance from the floor, lift the leg with your hands and slowly and smoothly bring it up toward your body, placing your left foot atop your right hip.

- Angle your torso forward and push your palms into the ground, with your fingers pointing back toward your knees.

- Slightly bend your elbows and bring your outer hands and outer forearms

together until they touch. Bend your elbows into a 90-degree angle and walk your knees toward your hands.

- Angle the front of your body to rest on your upper arms and burrow your elbows below your belly button. Don't let your elbows move away from each other; if necessary, you can tie them together with a piece of soft fabric.

- Tense your stomach across your elbows and bring your forehead to the ground. Straighten your knees and extend your legs out behind your body with the tops of your feet touching the ground. Tense your hips and slightly bend your shoulders downward.

- Raise your head off the ground and gaze ahead. Slightly angle your weight forward to bring your feet off the ground. Your body and legs should be parallel to the ground.

- Stay in this position for only a handful of seconds at first. Over time, you will be able to increase your time in this pose, as you grow in strength.

- To exit this pose, lower your head and angle backward until your feet touch the ground. Bend your knees, and raise your torso off your arms. Unlock your legs and let them rest straight ahead of you in staff pose.

- The next time you do the peacock, reverse your leg position in the lotus.

The Shoulder Press

Focus: Arms
Level: Advanced
Total Time: 30 seconds
Indications: balance, indigestion, constipation
Contraindications: Elbow, wrist, shoulder, lower back injury

The Shoulder Press

The shoulder press helps you build strength in your wrists and arms. It can also help you develop good posture. This is a great pose to perform after the eagle, the garland, or any bound angle pose. It is also useful to perform the shoulder press before doing a standing forward bend or the downward-facing dog (you'll find these poses in Chapter 11). Individuals with an elbow, wrist, lower back, or shoulder injury should avoid the shoulder press.

- Begin in a squat with your feet slightly more than shoulder width apart. Angle your torso in between your knees.

- Staying low, raise your hips until your thighs are almost parallel with the ground.

- Keep your shoulders and upper arms between your legs, resting your upper arms on your thighs, just above the knee.

- Plant your left hand on the ground just inside your left foot, with the fingers pointing forward. Repeat this process with your right hand. Your upper back will arch during this process.

- Press your palms into the ground and gently shift your weight from your feet to your hands. Start to straighten your arms. As you do this, your feet will raise off the ground.

- Press your outer arms and inner thighs together. If you can, cross both of your ankles. Gaze straight forward. Stay in this position for 30 seconds.

- To release yourself from this position, bend your elbows, breathe out, and let your feet return to the ground. Shift your weight back onto your feet, then move your arms to your sides, to return to the initial squat position.

- Relax and breathe.

The Plow

Focus: Shoulders
Level: Advanced
Total Time: Up to 5 minutes
Indications: backache, restlessness, sinus problems, headache, stimulates thyroid; modifications for high blood pressure, asthma Contraindications: diarrhea, neck injury

The Plow

The plow opens your shoulders and stretches your spine while energizing your thyroid gland. It can offer relief to individuals with a backache, headache, restlessness, or sinus problems. If you have diarrhea, a neck injury, or are currently menstruating, you should stay away from the plow.

Individuals with high blood pressure or asthma can perform this pose with the modification of supporting their legs on a chair or wall. The plow in its full form is a very advanced position that you should introduce yourself to with the help of an experienced instructor before attempting it on your own.

- Begin in a supported shoulder stand, with your legs pointing up and your hands supporting your back.

- Breathe out as you slowly bend from your hip joints to bring your feet down to the ground over your head. Keep your legs fully extended and your torso straight and vertical. When your toes reach the ground, lift your thighs and your tailbone toward the sky, pulling your inside groin into your abdomen. Visualize your body as suspended from your groin to

make it easier. Move your chin away from your breastbone and relax your throat. Breathe steadily throughout.

- When your back is stable, lower your arms and clasp your hands together, pressing your arms into the ground.

- At first, sustain this pose for 30 seconds, but over time, increase the length, up to five minutes.

- To release from this position, breathe out as you return your hands to your back and raise your legs to return to a supported shoulder stand. From there, inhale, then as you exhale roll out of the shoulder stand into the corpse pose.

Chapter 6 : Yoga For The Back

The Bridge

Focus: Spine
Level: Beginner
Total Time: 30 to 60 seconds
Indications: asthma, sinus problems; energizes thyroid, abdomen, lungs; relieves menstrual pain, menopause symptoms; prevent headaches Contraindications: neck injury

The Bridge

The bridge is great for many parts of your body but it primarily stretches out your spine, neck and chest. It can also energize your thyroid, abdomen and lungs. The bridge can help reenergize your legs, improve your digestion and can help prevent headaches, fatigue, insomnia and back pain. Many people who suffer from asthma, sinus problems, osteoporosis and high blood pressure find the bridge very soothing. Women often find it helpful in relieving menstrual pain and menopause symptoms. Warning: <u>this pose can lead to neck injury if performed incorrectly</u>.

- Lie down on the ground. You can place a blanket underneath your shoulders for support if you desire. Bend your knees and pull them as close to your sitting bones as you can.

- Breathe out as you press your feet and arms into the ground and push your tailbone up to activate your glutes before raising your hips off the ground.

- Your knees should remain directly above your feet. It may help to fold

your hands under your pelvis and use your arms to support your shoulders.

- Move your knees away from your hips to lengthen your tailbone and bring your pubis up toward your belly button.

- Pull your chin away from your breastbone, tense your shoulder blades and press your sternum up.

- Remain in this position for up to 60 seconds, taking full, deliberate breaths. To release, exhale while slowly lowering your back and hips onto the ground.

The Extended Puppy

Focus: Spine
Level: Beginner
Total Time: 30 to 60 seconds
Indications: stress, insomnia
Contraindications: knee injury

The Extended Puppy

The extended puppy opens your spine and shoulders. The only restriction for this pose is if you have a knee injury.

- Get down on all fours and make sure that your shoulders are directly above your wrists and your hips are directly above your knees. Work your hands slightly forward and curl your toes under your feet. Breathe out and position your hips halfway to your feet. Avoid letting your elbows make contact with the floor as you do this.

- Lower your face toward the ground and release your neck. Your lower back should remain slightly arched. Push your palms into the floor and extend through your arms as you move your hips back. This movement should cause a stretch to occur in your spine.

- Remain in the extended puppy for 30 to 60 seconds, breathing deeply and steadily, in and out.

- To release yourself from this position, simply come back up onto all fours.

The Wide-Angle Seated Forward Bend

Focus: Spine
Level: Beginner
Total Time: 60 seconds
Indications: arthritis; detoxify kidneys,
Contraindications: modification for lower back injury

The Wide-Angle Seated Forward Bend

The wide-angle seated forward bend focuses on building strength in your spine while stretching the backs and insides of your legs. It can stimulate your abdominal organs and release your groin. Beginners who try this pose may find it helpful to bend their knees until they have more practice. Experts believe the wide-angle seated forward bend can improve arthritis symptoms and detox your kidneys. Individuals with a lower back injury should sit on a folded blanket and focus on keeping their torso erect.

- Begin by getting into staff pose: sit down on the ground and stretch your legs straight forward, flexing your ankles and bending your toes back toward your torso, which is suspended straight and tall, rising from your hips to the sky.

- Angle your body back slightly, using your hands to support yourself, and open your legs so that your pubis and apex form a 90-degree angle. Raise yourself up on your hands and move your hips forward so that you can widen your legs by 20 degrees.

- Turn your thighs outward and push them into the ground so that your kneecaps are pointed straight up. Press the balls of your feet into the ground to stretch the soles of your feet.

- Keeping your thighs pinned to the ground and your kneecaps stable, gently stretch your hands between your legs, moving them as far forward as you can, as if you were moving into a forward bend. Focus on moving away from your hip joints and keeping the front of your body long. Avoid bending at your waist; instead bend from your hips.

- Try to increase the length of your stretch each time you breathe out. Keep lengthening the stretch with every exhale until you can stretch no farther in comfort.

- Stay in this pose for at least 60 seconds. To release yourself from this position, breathe in and raise your body up, keeping it long.

Spine Twist

Focus: Spine
Level: Beginner
Total Time: 30 to 60 seconds
Indications: lower backache, sciatica, neck pain, second trimester pregnancy
Contraindications: blood pressure (high or low), headache, diarrhea, insomnia, menstruation

Spine Twist

The spine twist focuses on building strength in your spine as well as your hips and shoulders. It offers relief for lower backaches, sciatica, and neck pain. Experts also believe the spine twist can help treat carpal tunnel syndrome. The spine twist can massage your abdominal organs, relieve stress, and help with digestion. Pregnant women may find it therapeutic to perform this pose through their second trimester. Individuals with a headache, diarrhea, menstruation or sleeplessness should avoid this pose, as should those who experience blood pressure problems.

- Begin by sitting on the ground with your legs in front of your body.

- Transfer your weight to your right hip. Bend your knees and stretch your legs to the left. Rest your feet on the ground outside of your left hip and rest your ankle in your right arch.

- Breathe in and raise the top of your chest to elongate the front of your body. Breathe out and rotate your body to the right while keeping your left buttock close to the ground. Elongate your tailbone into the ground and soften your stomach.

- Place your left hand behind your right knee and rest your right hand on the ground next to your right hip. Slightly draw your left shoulder back while tensing your shoulder blades across your back. Continue to rotate to the right and turn your head to the right.

- As you breathe in, continue to raise your torso through your chest. As you breathe out, continue to rotate your body a little further.

- Stay in this position for 30 to 60 seconds. To release yourself from this pose, breathe out and untwist your body, returning to your starting position.

- Repeat the twist, this time in the opposite direction.

The Cobra

Focus: Spine
Level: Beginner
Total Time: 15 to 30 seconds
Indications: asthma
Contraindications: headache, pregnancy, carpal tunnel, back injury

The Cobra

The cobra focuses on building strength in your spine while simultaneously opening your shoulders, abdomen, lungs, and chest. It is great for opening up your lungs and heart, making it very therapeutic for individuals who suffer from asthma. Those who have a headache or who are pregnant should avoid this pose, as should people with carpal tunnel syndrome or a back injury.

- Begin by lying on your stomach with your face down, your legs straight out behind you, and the tops of your feet flat on the ground. Place your hands under your shoulders, keeping your elbows close to your body. Press your pubis, thighs and feet into the ground.

- Breathe in, raise your chest off the ground by straightening your arms and pushing your torso up to a comfortable height. Press your tailbone into your pubis and raise your pubis toward your belly button to shorten your hip points. Slightly tense your hips.

- Tense your shoulder blades across your back as you extend your ribs ahead. Raise yourself through the top of your chest. Ensure that your

backbend is even throughout your entire spine.

- Stay in this position for 15 to 30 seconds while you breathe normally. To release yourself from this position, breathe out and lower your body back to the ground.

The Locust

Focus: Spine
Level: Beginner
Total Time: 30 to 60 seconds
Indications: constipation, gas, lower back pain, exhaustion
Contraindications: headache, major back injury; modification for neck injury

The Locust

The locust focuses on building strength in your spine as well as the backs of your arms, legs, and hips, all while simultaneously stretching your thighs, chest, stomach and shoulders. It can help you fight stress while improving your posture. Experts believe that the locust can offer relief for constipation, gas, exhaustion and lower back pain. Those with a headache or a major back injury should avoid this pose. Individuals with a neck injury may want to use a thick blanket to support their forehead during this pose.

- Begin by lying face down on your stomach with your arms at your sides, palms facing up. Turn your thighs inward by rotating your big toes toward each other. Tense your hips so that your tailbone pushes into your pubis.

- Breathe in. Raise your head, upper body, legs and arms off the ground. Tense your hips again and actively reach through your legs towards the soles of your feet and toes. Your big toes should stay facing each other. Raise your arms parallel to the ground and extend back through the tips of your fingers as you push into the sky. Strongly press your shoulder blades together.

- Stare ahead while keeping your head stable. The back of your neck should be long with your head raised.

- Stay in this position for 30 to 60 seconds. To release yourself from this position, breathe out, lower your body to the ground, rest, and take a few breaths.

The Standing Half-Forward Bend

Focus: Back
Level: Beginner
Total Time: N/A
Indications: digestion, liver, kidneys, insomnia
Contraindications: modification for neck injury

The Standing Half-Forward Bend

The standing half-forward bend focuses on strengthening your back to improve your posture while simultaneously stretching the front of your body. Those who have a neck injury can perform this pose, but they should avoid raising their head to gaze forward.

- Begin in a standing forward bend and rest the tips of your fingers on the ground next to your feet. Breathe in, straighten your elbows and curve your body away from your thighs. Try to create as much space between

your belly button and your pubis as you can.

- Push into the ground with the tips of your fingers and raise the top of your chest up and forward from the ground. You can slightly bend your knees if needed.

- Gaze forward without tightly crunching the back of your neck. Take a few breaths while in this position, then breathe out and return to the standing forward bend.

The Sphinx

Focus: Spine
Level: Beginner
Total Time: 5 to 10 breaths
Indications: fatigue, depression
Contraindications: headache, back injury

The Sphinx

The sphinx strengthens your spine while simultaneously stretching your shoulders, abdomen, lungs, and chest. It can energize your abdominal organs and help relieve stress. Individuals with a headache or back injury should avoid this pose.

- Begin by lying on your stomach with your legs together. Tense your tailbone into your pubis and elongate it toward the soles of your feet. Turn your thighs inward to elongate your sacrum and stretch your lower back to prep it for the rest of this pose.

- While actively stretching through your toes, continue to elongate your tailbone. Slightly tense your hips and activate your legs while resting your brain, eyes and tongue.

- Position your elbows under your shoulders and set your forearms on the ground. Breathe in and raise your head and torso off the ground and into a soft backbend.

- Softly draw your stomach up from the ground to make your backbend evenly distributed across your vertebrae.

- Stay in this position for five to 10 breaths. To release yourself from this position, breathe out, gently lower your stomach to the ground followed by your chest and head. Lay your head on its side and rest on the ground for a few moments as you breathe consistently.

The Sage

Focus: Spine
Level: Intermediate
Total Time: 30 to 60 seconds
Indications: backache, hip pain, constipation, asthma, exhaustion
Contraindications: spinal injury, blood pressure (high or low), diarrhea, insomnia, migraines

The Sage

The sage strengthens and stretches your spine while stretching your shoulders and energizing your brain. It offers relief to sufferers of backache and hip pain. Experts also believe the sage can offer relief for indigestion, constipation, backaches, restlessness, exhaustion, and asthma. Those with a back injury should only perform the sage under the supervision of an experienced instructor. Individuals with blood pressure problems, migraines, diarrhea, or sleeplessness should avoid it entirely.

- Begin by sitting in staff pose. Sit down on the ground and stretch your legs straight forward, flexing your ankles and bending your toes back toward your torso, which is suspended straight and tall, rising from your hips to the sky.

- Bend your right knee, resting the sole of your right foot on the ground. Pull this foot close to your sitting bones. Rotate your left leg slightly inward and anchor your upper thigh into the ground. Press down your left

heel and move the bottom of your big toe away from your abdomen. Press the inside of your right foot into the ground while relaxing your inner right groin.

- Anchor the thigh of your straightened left leg to the ground to help elongate your spine. Rotate your body to the right, hooking your left arm over your right thigh. Hold the outside of your thigh with your hand and use this leverage to pull your thigh up while letting your right hip press into the ground. Press the tips of your fingers into the ground behind your abdomen, raise your torso to lengthen it, and angle it slightly forward. Let your groin fall into your abdomen.

- Elongate your spine with each inhale and rotate your body further as you breathe out. Keep your thigh close to your stomach and angle yourself across your shoulder blades to create an upper backbend. Slowly turn your head to the right.

- Stay in this position for 30 to 60 seconds.

- To exit this pose, breathe out as you release your arms and return to staff pose: stretch your legs straight forward, flexing your ankles and bending your toes back toward your torso, which is suspended straight and tall, rising from your hips to the sky. Breathe in, filling your lungs and expanding your chest. Breathe out slowly, taking twice as long to empty your lungs as you took to fill them. Take another breath and let it out

- Repeat the process with the other side of your body.

The Hero

Focus: Arches
Level: Beginner
Total Time: 30 seconds plus
Indications: indigestion, flatulence, menstrual pain
Contraindications: ankle injury, knee injury

The Hero

The hero strengthens the arches of your feet while simultaneously stretching your legs and ankle. It is great for relieving menstrual pain, indigestion, and flatulence. Experts believe that the hero can help asthma and high blood pressure. If you experience heart problems or have a headache, you should avoid this one. If you have an ankle or knee injury, you should consult with an experienced instructor before taking on this pose.

Note: The safest way to perform the hero, especially at the beginning is by sitting on a yoga block. It enforces proper positioning of knees and thighs to avoid injury. You should feel no pain in your knees when you are in this pose. If you feel any pain at all, stop and add some height to your hip support.

The illustration above provides a modification for more experienced yogis.

- Lay a folded mat before you and place a yoga block on the ground in front of the mat. Stand on your knees in the middle of the mat with your ankles supported on its edge. Your knees should be hip-distance apart. Your feet will extend to either side of the yoga block on the ground, slightly wider than your hips. Inhale.

- As you exhale, slowly lower your hips between your heels and sit down onto the yoga block, resting your palms comfortably atop your upper thighs. If you experience any knee pain at all, stop and provide additional seating support, raising your hips to relieve the pressure on your knees.

- As you breathe in, double-check your feet; the pressure on the ground should come from the center of your feet, not from either inner or outer edges. Your inner heels should be touching your outer hips.

- Continue breathing and check that your thighs are parallel. Ensure that your sitting bones are even. Tilt your hips so that you are sitting atop your sitting bones. Let your tailbone reach down into the block. Let your back sustain its normal curvature.

- Let your arms rise into their sockets and use slight activation in your shoulder blades to expand the top of your chest. Align your head atop your spine and let your soft gaze be straight ahead and slightly below eye level.

- As you breathe in deeply, be aware of your breath filling your body and going deep down into your being. Exhale slowly, following your breath and letting it take with it all tension, stress, and anxiety.

- Beginners should stay in this position for 30 seconds at first. Over time you will be able to gradually extend your time in this pose to five

minutes.

- To release this pose, lean forward, onto your hands and knees and straighten behind you first one leg, and then the other..

The Revolved Head to Knee

Focus: Spine
Level: Intermediate
Total Time: 60 seconds
Indications: backache headache, insomnia, exhaustion; improve digestion, liver and kidney function
Contraindications: diarrhea

The Revolved Head to Knee

The revolved head to knee works to open your spine while simultaneously stretching your hamstrings and shoulders. It can energize your liver and kidneys and can lead to better digestion. Experts believe that regularly performing the revolved head to knee can offer relief to those suffering from backaches, sleeplessness, headaches, and exhaustion. Stay away from this pose if you're currently suffering from diarrhea.

- Begin by sitting with your torso straight upright and your legs spread apart. Bend your right knee out to the side and draw your right heel up to your groin. Flex your right knee slightly and move your right heel close to your left buttock.

- Breathe out, angle your torso to the left and bring your left shoulder to meet your inner left knee. Rest your left elbow on the ground inside your left knee, with your palm facing up. Grasp the big toe side of your left foot. Elongate the right side of your body, as you stretch your right arm upward to curve over your left thigh. Continue to stretch your right side

until you can touch the toes of your left foot with the fingers of your right hand.

- Push your left thigh into the ground as you breathe in and gently stretch out your left leg. Avoid moving your left shoulder away from your knee as you straighten the left leg.

- When your left knee is fully extended, you can then turn your head and look toward the sky. Breathe in and move your right arm straight into the sky, angling toward your left foot. Breathe in again, stretch your right arm over the left side of your head, and grasp the edge of your right foot. Move your elbows apart and turn your head toward the sky.

- Stay in this position for several deep, slow breaths.

- To exit this pose, release your left foot with your hands, undo the twist of your torso, and rise up until you are once again sitting upright with your hands lowered at your sides. Return your legs to straight before you.

- Repeat this process, stretching to the right side.

The Reclining Hero

Focus: Arches
Level: Intermediate
Total Time: 30 to 60 seconds +
Indications: varicose veins, respiration, high blood pressure, sciatica, infertility, insomnia, flat feet
Contraindications: injury to knee, back, ankle

The Reclining Hero

The reclining hero works to build strength in your arches while simultaneously stretching your legs, abdomen, and hip flexors. Regular use can relieve numerous conditions including varicose veins, other leg-and foot-related issues, respiratory conditions, and high blood pressure. Individuals with ankle, knee, hip, or back injuries should forego this pose. The prerequisite for the reclining hero is to be comfortable in the hero pose, with or without a block supporting your hips.

- Begin in the hero, seated on your hips and knees, with your feet – soles upward – just outside your hips.

- Breathe out and position your hands on the ground slightly behind you. Angle your torso back onto your hands, then your forearms, keeping your knees and shins rooted on the ground.

- If your knees or shins come loose from the floor, you have leaned back too far. Rise back up and lower your torso again, supporting it on your arms but stopping before your knees begin to lose contact with the floor. This is the perfect position for you.

- If you are able to go farther, however, lower your torso until you are lying on your shoulders. At this point lower your arms to your sides with your palms facing up.

- If your ribs stick up dramatically, lower them and press your pubis into your belly button.

- Sustain this position for 30 seconds in the beginning. Over time, you can gradually work your way up to five minutes at a stretch.

- To release from this position, push your forearms into the ground and shift your weight onto your hands. Using the support of your hands, raise yourself back into the hero pose using the strength surrounding your breastbone.

Chapter 7: Yoga For The Hips

The Bound Angle

Focus: Hips
Level: Beginner
Total Time: 5 Minutes
Indications: blood circulation, menstrual pain, menopause symptoms, high blood pressure, asthma, depression, anxiety, fatigue Contraindications: knee or groin injury

The Bound Angle

The bound angle pose (a.k.a. the cobbler's pose) is a great hip opener and is a recommended precursor to standing poses and twists. The bound angle energizes your lower abdominal organs, your heart, and your blood circulation. For women, it can help relieve menstrual pain and menopausal symptoms. It can also reduce high blood pressure and relieve asthma symptoms. In addition to opening your hips, the bound angle can stretch your groin, knees, and inner thighs.

- Start in the staff position. Breathe out, bend your knees and pull your heels toward your torso. Grasp your feet with your hands, pressing the soles of your feet together. As your knees bend, let them fall out to either

side of your body. Pull your heels as close to your pelvis as possible and flex your toes up and apart.

- You should be sitting so that your pubis and tailbone are equal distance from the ground. Lengthen the front of your chest by keeping your shoulders back and raising your breastbone. Allow your thighs to gravitate toward the ground.

- Hold this position for up to five minutes. To exit this position, breathe in, slowly bring your knees together, and return your legs to the starting position

The Reclining Bound Angle

Focus: Hips
Level: Beginner
Total Time: 60 seconds plus
Indications: circulation, menstrual pain, menopause symptoms, digestion, fertility
Contraindications: modifications for groin injury or knee injury

The Reclining Bound Angle

The reclining bound angle opens your hips while simultaneously stretching your knees, inner thighs, and groin. It can enhance your circulation, relieve menstrual pain and menopause symptoms, energize your abdominal organs, and relieve stress. Individuals with a groin or knee injury should approach this pose with supports under their knees.

- Sit on the ground and place some supportive padding directly behind you. Begin by adopting the bound angle pose. Next, breathe out and lean your torso back toward the ground, supporting yourself with your arms until your back is lying on the padding.

- Lift your hips slightly to allow your lower back to lengthen, then return your hips to the ground.

- Your knees should already be apart with the soles of your feet together, a comfortable distance from your groin. Do not press your knees to the ground; you want your groin muscles to remain soft. Place supports under your thighs, if this is more comfortable. The purpose of this pose is

relaxation and comfort, not stretching.

- Rest your arms comfortably on the ground at a 45-degree angle from your torso.

- You can rest here for as long as you like. Let it remove stress and allow your body – and your mind – to become still and calm.

- To release yourself from this position, straighten your legs until you are lying in corpse pose.

Child's Pose

Focus: Hips
Level: Beginner
Total Time: Three minutes
Indications: fatigue
Contraindications: pregnancy, diarrhea, knee injury

Child's Pose

The child's pose stretches your hips, ankles, and thighs and can help beat fatigue. It is an easy position that almost anyone can use for relaxation. Just don't use it if you are pregnant, are suffering from diarrhea, or have a knee injury.

- Begin in a kneeling position with your knees hip-width apart and your feet together, soles facing up. Take slow, full breaths throughout this pose.

  Lower your hips until they are resting on your heels (or as close to your heels as you can get them). Breathe out and bend your torso forward to the ground until you melt onto the top of your thighs, with your forehead resting on the ground. Again, if you can't comfortably bend this far down, go just as far as you can. Over time, your body will relax more and you will be able to melt further down into the child's pose.

- Rest your arms on the ground beside your body, with your palms facing up. Feel your spinal column relax. Let your shoulders relax downward and shoulder blades naturally open.

- To gently stretch your upper back, rest your arms straight forward out of your shoulders. Again, if you can't get your arms straight, just go as far

as you can. Over time, you will be able to stretch your arms straight overhead, with complete range of motion.

- Stay in this position as long as you like. To release from this pose, breathe in and raise your torso up.

The Boat

Focus: Hip Flexors
Level: Intermediate
Total Time: 10 to 20 seconds plus
Indications: energizes thyroid, prostate, kidneys
Contraindications: asthma, low blood pressure, headache, diarrhea, insomnia, pregnancy; modification for neck injury

The Boat

The boat builds strength in your hip flexors as well as your spine and abdomen while energizing internal organs that include your intestines, thyroid gland, prostate gland, and kidneys. Those with asthma, heart problems or low blood pressure should avoid this pose, as should those with a headache, diarrhea, or sleeplessness. Women who are pregnant or who are experiencing menstruation should avoid it as well. If you have a neck injury, you should sit in front of a chair or wall so that you can support your head when you lean back.

- Begin by sitting on the ground with your legs stretched out in front of you.

- Place your hands on the ground slightly behind your hips, with your fingers pointing forward, and press them into the ground. Arch your chest and slightly lean your body backward. Keep your spine straight as you do

this.

- Sit tall. Focus on elongating the front of your body between your pubis and the top of your chest. Sit on top of your sitting bones and over your tailbone.

- Breathe out and bend your knees, with your feet on the ground at first.

- Arch your chest and slightly lean your body backward. Keep your spine straight and tall.

- Keeping your chest tall and your spine straight, walk your feet on your tippy-toes, bringing them closer to your hips. This will naturally mean you lean slightly back to keep your balance.

- Raise first one foot off the ground and then the other. Don't worry about straightening your legs at this point. Experiment with this until you are comfortable enough with this to have both feet off the ground at the same time.

- The boat allows you much freedom of positioning. While you are experimenting with your balance, don't forget to activate your feet. You can point your toes or flex your feet. This is a particularly good position in which to practice spreading each toe out and stretching them all apart.

- Resist the natural tendency to hunch your back; keep your spine straight, your neck continuing the line of your backbone up through the top of your head.

- As you gain confidence in balancing, straight-backed, with both legs off the ground, begin to experiment with straightening your legs. Eventually you want to be able to balance on your hips with both legs straight in the air, at a 45-degree angle to the ground. Elongate your tailbone downward and raise your pubis toward your belly button. If you can, straighten your knees by raising the tips of your toes above eye level.

- When you are comfortably balanced, extend your arms to the side and

separate your shoulder blades, reaching outward through the tips of your fingers. Keep your lower stomach firm and flat. Anchor yourself into the ground by pressing the tops of your thighs downward while lifting the top of your chest even further.

- Continue to breathe steadily. Keep your neck straight and long, an extension out of the top of your spine. Your chin should feel slightly tucked down but your jaw should feel loose.

- Start off easy with this pose. Gradually work your way up until you can sustain this pose for a minute at a time.

- To release yourself from this position, breathe out and bend your legs, lowering your feet to the ground. Breathe in and return to the starting position.

The Fire Log

Focus: Hips
Level: Intermediate
Total Time: 60 seconds
Indications: anxiety, stress
Contraindications: knee injury, lower back injury

The Fire Log

The fire log focuses on stretching your hips and groin area. Those who have a knee or lower back injury should avoid this pose.

The fire log is so-named because it consists of stacking your lower legs, one on top of the other.

- Begin by sitting on the edge of a thick, folded blanket with your legs straight in front of you. Draw your torso up and roll back the tops of your upper arm bones while pushing the bottoms of your shoulder blades together. Sit tall and straight, as if a string were pulling straight up from

the top of your head.

- Bend your left leg and place the bony part of your left ankle atop your right leg so that your foot sits just outside of the right hip, just above your right knee. This is the half fire log pose.

- To protect your knee joint, do not allow your knee to fall below your ankle. When you first begin to practice this pose, don't be alarmed if your knee rises well above the ankle; over time you will be able to lower it until it stacks horizontally above the other leg.

- To move into full fire log pose, bend your right leg until it is directly underneath the left leg. Your right foot should lie just outside your left knee and your left heel will be positioned beneath your right knee. Keeping your torso elongated, breathe out and stretch slightly forward, bending from the hips. Rest your hands on the ground beside you, providing support with your fingers.

- As you breathe in, your chest will rise. When this happens, elongate your torso even further, stretching up from your hips to the top of your head.

- Stay in this position for at least 60 seconds. To release yourself from this position, breathe in, bring your body upright, and unhook your legs.

- Repeat this process, placing right leg on the top this time.

The Happy Baby

Focus: Hip Joints
Level: Beginner
Total Time: 30 seconds
Indications: brain relaxation, anxiety
Contraindications: pregnancy, knee injury; modification for neck injury

The Happy Baby

The happy baby works to open your hip joints while stretching your spine, back, and groin. This is a very relaxing pose for your mind and can help relieve anxiety. Those who are pregnant or have a knee injury should avoid performing this pose. If you have a neck injury, use a blanket to support your head.

- Begin by lying on your back. Breathe out and bend your knees toward your stomach.

- Breathe in and grasp the outsides of your feet with your hands. Spread your knees to hip width and lower them toward your upper arms.

- Pull your legs down until each ankle is straight above its knee. Flex your ankles and slowly push your feet into your hands while providing opposing force with your hands.

- Remain in this active tension point for up to 30 seconds before releasing your grasp and returning to the original position.

The Heron

Focus: Hips
Level: Beginner
Total Time: 30 to 60 seconds
Indications: flat feet, gas
Contraindications: ankle injury, knee injury

The Heron

The heron opens your hips while intensely stretching your hamstrings. Experts believe it can offer relief for flat feet and treatment for gas. Women who are experiencing menstruation and anyone with ankle or knee problems should not perform this pose without the help of an experienced instructor.

- Begin by sitting tall, with your legs out straight in front of you.
- Bend your right knee, folding your lower leg until your pointed foot –

sole facing upward – is on the ground just outside your right thigh. You should be resting on your sit bones. If your sit bones are not sharing your weight equally, use a folded blanket or a block to raise your hips off the ground and enable your hips to rest evenly on the ground.

- Bend your left knee up, sliding your foot back toward your left thigh. Grasp your left calf with both hands.

- Keep your back straight and your torso tall. Pull your shoulder blades together to make room for your chest to rise and expand. Breathe in and, with your hands, rise up and straighten your left leg. If this action is easy for you, grasp your calf further down your leg. Eventually, you should be able to grasp your foot and still comfortably raise your leg.

- Stay in this position for several breaths. Keep your chest open, your shoulders down, and your back straight.

- To release the heron, breathe out, bend and release your right leg, lowering your foot to the ground. Slowly straighten your left leg and return to your starting position.

- Repeat this process, this time straightening your right leg.

The Eye of the Needle

Focus: Hips
Level: Beginner
Total Time: 30 to 60 seconds
Indications: depression, anxiety; stimulates blood circulation
Contraindications: back, knee or hip injury, pregnancy (after first trimester)

The Eye of the Needle

The eye of the needle focuses on opening your hips while simultaneously stretching your hamstrings and inner thighs. Individuals with back, knee, or hip injuries should avoid this pose, as should pregnant women who are past their first trimester.

- Begin in the corpse pose. Bend your knees and slide your feet partway toward your hips, keeping your legs hip width apart. Rest your arms beside your body and spend a few moments focusing on your breathing. Breathe slowly throughout this exercise, exhaling for twice as long as you inhale.

- Breathe in and raise your left leg, rotating your leg so that your knee points outward. Rest your left anklebones on the top of your right thigh, just below the knee. Flex your left foot, stretching your toes apart.

- Thread your left arm between your legs and grasp your right thigh with both hands. Interlace your fingers beneath the thigh.

- Keeping your shoulders firmly against the ground, with your arms pull your thigh toward your body until your right foot is off the ground. You should feel slight resistance but it should not be painful. Keep your shoulders flat and relax your upper body, including your facial muscles.

- Expand your chest, keeping your back on the ground. Move your chin toward your breastbone and gaze down your body. Elongate your spine by pushing your tailbone into the ground. Stay in this position for 30 to 60 seconds.

- To release, let go of your right leg and lower your right foot to the ground. Uncross your legs and return your left foot to the ground.

- Breathe deeply, then repeat, placing the right leg over the left thigh.

The Wide Leg Forward Bend

Focus: Hips
Level: Beginner
Total Time: 30 to 60 seconds
Indications: lower back pain, headaches, exhaustion
Contraindications: modification for lower back pain

The Wide Leg Forward Bend

The wide leg forward bend opens your hips while simultaneously stretching and building strength in your spine and in the backs of your legs. It is also great for treating lower back pain, headaches, exhaustion, and depression. Individuals with lower back problems should not complete the full forward bend.

- Begin by standing in mountain pose. Stand tall and straight with your feet separated enough to feel stable.

- Now, widen your stance, setting your feet four feet apart. Your feet should be facing straight forward. Establish a solid connection with the ground by shifting your weight distribution so that it is equally divided between the base of your big toes, the base of your little toes, and both left and right sides of your heels.

- Place your hands on your hips. Draw in your ankles to raise the arches of

your feet. Push the outer edge and the balls of your feet into the ground. Activate the muscles in your thighs.

- Breathe in and expand your chest, elongating your torso. Breathe out and bend forward from the hips, keeping your back straight. When your torso is parallel to the ground, press the tips of your fingers into the ground and align them straight down from your shoulders. Straighten – but do not lock – your elbows.

- Round your back from your tailbone to the top of your neck. Keep your head raised and your neck long. Stare up. Elongate the front of your body by moving your thighs back and broaden the bottom of your abdomen by moving your inner groin apart.

- Take several breaths in this position. Then, slowly work the tips of your fingers back between your feet.

- Continue to breathe. As you exhale, bend your elbows and pull your body down into a complete forward bend. Sustain the length in your torso as long as possible while you lower it toward the ground. Rest the top of your head on the ground if it touches.

- Press your palms into the ground and slowly work your hands back until you can lay your upper arms on the ground. Broaden your shoulder blades and keep your arms parallel to each. Gently move your shoulders away from your ears.

- Stay in this position for 30 to 60 seconds. To release yourself from this position, move your hands forward under your shoulders again and use them to raise and elongate the front of your body.

- Breathe in, lower your tailbone toward the ground and smoothly raise your torso, letting your arms hang naturally. Raise your upper body, one vertebra at a time, from tailbone to head, until your spine is vertical.

- Return to mountain pose. Stand tall and straight with your feet separated enough to feel stable. Establish a solid connection with the ground by

shifting your weight distribution so that it is equally divided between the base of your big toes, the base of your little toes, and both left and right sides of your heels.

The Side Reclining Leg Raise

Focus: Hips
Level: Advanced
Total Time: 30 to 60 seconds
Indications: colitis, peptic ulcers, arthritis, sciatica (under professional supervision), urinary disorders, sex gland disorders, hernia prevention
Contraindications: slipped disk, chronic diarrhea or headaches, sciatica

The Side Reclining Leg Raise

The side reclining leg raise opens your hips while simultaneously stretching the sides and backs of your legs.

- Begin by lying on the ground on your left side. Flex your left foot, tighten your ankle and stabilize your body using the outside of your foot. Extend your left arm above your head on the ground, bend your left elbow and use your hand to support your head.

- Turn your right leg outward so that your toes point toward the sky. Bend your right knee and grab your right calf with your right hand. Breathe in and slowly stretch your leg toward the sky, straightening it completely. Once you can do this comfortably, grasp your big toe instead, reaching inside of your legs to wrap your fingers around the bottom of your foot and then straighten your leg.

- Tense your sacrum into your abdomen to prevent your leg from leaning

forward. Press actively through the soles of both feet. Once your right leg is straight, hold this position for several breaths.

- To release from this position, bend and lower your right leg, then roll onto your back to let all your muscles relax.

- Take a few full breaths. Then roll onto your right side and repeat the process.

Chapter 8: Yoga For The Neck

The Cat

Focus: Neck and Back Torso
Level: Beginner
Total Time: N/A
Indications: digestion, stimulates kidneys and adrenal glands
Contraindications: modifications for neck injury

The Cat

The cat pose stretches your back and neck while gently massaging your stomach and spine. It is often paired with the cow pose. You'll find this combination used in Chapter 3 as a warm up. Individuals with a neck injury must keep their head carefully extended straight out from a straight neck throughout this pose.

- Begin on all fours, with your spine neutral (straight) and your neck long. If you have a neck injury, you will keep your head and neck in this neutral position throughout the exercise. Your knees will be hip width apart, directly under your hips.

- Your hands will be placed directly beneath your shoulders, with your fingers pointing forward. Do NOT lock your elbows. If you have a wrist injury, slightly flexing your arms at the elbow will provide additional support. If your injury doesn't allow you to bear weight on your wrists, rest your forearms on a chair or another slightly raised surface. Breathe in.

- As you breathe out, allow your head to droop until it hangs relaxed. At

the same time, press your belly button up toward your spine, pushing your back into a hump, like a cat arching its back. This will tuck in your tailbone and tilt the bottom of your pelvis forward.

- Breathe in as you return to the neutral position.

- Repeat the cat stretch five times. Over time, you can increase your repetitions up to 20 times in a single setting.

Dolphin Plank

Focus: Neck
Level: Intermediate
Total Time: 30 to 60 seconds
Indications: stress, depression, osteoporosis (preventative)
Contraindications: modification for shoulder injury, neck injury

Dolphin Plank

The dolphin plank works your neck muscles and stretches your lower legs, shoulders and arches. It builds strength in your legs, arms and core muscles. Regular performance of this pose can reduce the likelihood of developing osteoporosis. It offers stress relief and has been found helpful in treating depression.

- Begin in the dolphin pose: Stand on your hands and knees. Place your forearms flat on the ground with your elbows aligned with your shoulders. Clasp your hands together and firmly press your forearms into the ground. Press your hips up to the sky until your legs are straight.

- Bend your knees and step your feet behind you until your legs are straight. Your body will be parallel to the ground. Your shoulders should stay directly above your elbows. If you have a shoulder injury, use blankets to support your torso. If you have a neck injury, support your forehead on a yoga block or a chair seat.

- Press your forearms and elbows into the ground. Activate your shoulder blades across your back and spread them outward. Expand your collarbones as well.

- Push your thighs toward the sky while elongating your legs from your tailbone to the soles of your feet. Pull your belly button up toward your spine, resisting the urge to let your back sag. Lift your head from the back of your neck until it is parallel to the ground and gaze straight downward.

- Remain here for several breaths. To release yourself, breathe out and allow your knees to release to the ground, then lower your chest, bringing your arms down to your sides, resting face down on the ground. Let your muscles relax as you continue to breathe slowly and deeply.

The Fish

Focus: Neck
Level: Beginner
Total Time: 15 to 30 seconds
Indications: constipation, menstrual pain, backaches, exhaustion, anxiety, respiratory conditions
Contraindications: blood pressure (high or low), restlessness, migraine, major neck injury or lower back injury

The Fish

The fish will build strength in the back of your neck and your upper back while stretching your throat, the front of your neck, your deep hip flexors, and your rib muscles. Ancient texts claim that the performance of this pose can assist in naturally destroying diseases. Modern research shows that regular performance can help improve your posture. Experts also claim it can offer relief for constipation, menstrual-related pain, backaches, exhaustion, anxiety and respiratory conditions. Individuals with blood pressure problems, restlessness, a migraine, or a major neck or lower back injury should avoid this pose.

- Begin by lying on your back with your knees bent and your feet flat on the ground. Breathe in, raise your abdomen off the ground and place your hands beneath your hips, palms up. Lower your hips on top of your hands with your elbows and forearms close to your body.

- Breathe in and push your elbows and forearms into the ground. Press your shoulder blades up into your back. Breathe in again and raise your upper body and head off the ground. Allow the top of your head to tilt back and touch the ground but avoid crunching your neck. Keep your knees bent.

- Stay in this position for 15 to 30 seconds and breathe consistently. To release from this pose, breathe out, raise your head and lower your upper

body to the ground before letting your head rest on the ground as well. Bring your knees to your stomach and squeeze them with your hands as you allow your back muscles to relax.

The Ear to Shoulder

Focus: Neck
Level: Beginner
Total Time: 10 times per side
Indications:
Contraindications: neck injury, shoulder injury

The Ear to Shoulder

The ear to shoulder pose stretches your neck, your trapezius, and your shoulder muscles. You can easily perform it anywhere, sitting or standing, provided you keep your spine straight throughout. Individuals with a neck or shoulder injury should avoid this pose.

- Begin by sitting or standing with a straight spine. Inhale.

- Relax your arms and gaze straight ahead. Exhale as you lower your right ear toward your right shoulder. Do not tilt your head forward or backward.

- To extend this stretch (optional), place your right hand atop your head. Do not pull, but let the weight of your arm add to the stretch. Return your arm to your side.

- Breathe in and raise your head to the starting position.

- Take a breath, then repeat this process to the left.

The Corpse

Focus: Neck
Level: Beginner
Total Time: 5 minutes per every half hour of yoga
Indications: neck pain, stress, depression, high blood pressure
Contraindications: modification for lower back injury

The Corpse

The purpose of the corpse is to calm your entire body. It offers relief to problems related to neck pain such as restlessness, exhaustion, and headaches. The corpse can lower your blood pressure and treat cases of stress and depression. Pregnant women should perform this pose with their chest and head raised on a means of support. Individuals with a lower back injury should keep their knees bent and their feet flat on the ground a comfortable distance from their hips throughout.

- Begin by sitting on the ground with your knees bent and your feet touching the ground. Lean your body back and support yourself on your forearms. Bearing the weight of your torso on your hands, slightly raise your abdomen from the ground and press it into your tailbone

- Breathe in and gently stretch your right leg out followed by your left, extending each leg through the soles of your feet. Relax your legs and your groin and ensure that your legs extend in line with your torso. Let your feet relax and turn out as they will. Tighten your abdomen and ease your lower back down onto the ground, followed by your shoulders and then your head.

- Use your hands to gently stretch the bottom of your skull away from your

neck; stretch your spine down from the base of your neck into your tailbone. Your head should rest straight from all angles, facing straight up, and not tilted toward either shoulder.

- Extend your arms straight up toward the sky. Gently sway your torso back and forth to widen your ribs and separate your shoulder blades from your spine. Relax your arms until they rest on the ground by your sides with your palms facing up.

- Stretch your arms outward from your shoulder blades to your fingertips. Feel how your shoulder blades connect with the ground; their contact and pressure should be even. Visualize the ends of your shoulder blades rising crosswise into your back near the top of your chest.

- Expand your collarbones. Allow your organs to ease up, including your tongue, nose wings, inner ears and forehead. Let your eyes relax and stare toward your chest. Ease and relax your brain.

- Remain in this pose for five minutes per every half hour of yoga.

- To release yourself from this position, breathe out and roll onto your right side. Take a couple of breaths. Exhale and press your hands into the ground to raise your body.

Chapter 9: Yoga For The Chest

The Half-Moon

Focus: Chest
Level: Intermediate
Total Time: 30 to 60 seconds
Indications: osteoporosis, anxiety, exhaustion, digestion and menstrual pain
Contraindications: modification for neck injury

The Half-Moon

The half-moon stretches your chest, shoulders, spine, and lower legs while building strength in your legs, abdomen, spine, and hips. Regular performance can improve your balance and coordination while fending off stress. Experts believe the half-moon can relive osteoporosis, anxiety, exhaustion, digestion issues, and menstrual-related discomfort. Individuals with low blood pressure, sleeplessness, a migraine, or a headache should avoid this pose. If you have neck issues, do not turn your head up but gaze straight ahead.

- Begin in the extended triangle to your right side, with your left hand lowered to your left hip.

- Breathe in and bend your right knee. Slide your left foot six inches forward. As you move your left foot, stretch your right hand one foot in front of you, touching ground with your fingers. Breathe out, push your right hand and the heel of your right foot into the ground and straighten

your right leg. As you straighten your leg, raise your left leg parallel to the ground, stretching through your left heel. Avoid locking your right knee.

- Turn your upper body to the left and allow your left hip to shift forward slightly. Newcomers to this pose may find it helpful to keep their left hand on their hip and keep their head stable.

- Shift your body weight onto your right leg and move your lower hand toward the ground to help maintain your balance. Raise the inner ankle of your right foot. Push your sacrum and shoulder blades across your back and elongate your tailbone into your raised foot.

- Stay in this position for 30 to 60 seconds. To release yourself from this pose, breathe out and return your raised leg to the ground and into your starting position. Repeat for your reversed side.

The Low Lunge

Focus: Chest
Level: Beginner
Total Time: 60 seconds
Indications: sciatica
Contraindications: heart problems

The Low Lunge

The Low Lunge can help open up your chest and offers relief for sciatica. Individuals with heart problems should avoid this pose.

- Start in downward-facing dog. Stand on your hands and knees with your shoulders directly above your hands and your hips above your knees. Press your hips straight up until both legs and arms are straight. Let your neck continue the straight line of your back from hips to head. Breathe deeply and slowly.

- Step your right foot forward to your right thumb.

- Lower your left knee to the ground. Stabilize your right knee with your hands and move your left knee further behind you until a stretch occurs in your thigh and groin. Lay the top of your left foot on the ground.

- Breathe in and lift your torso until it is tall and vertical. When you inhale, let your chest rise and expand. Continue to reach your upper body toward the sky.

- Raise your arms out to your sides, then above your head. Let your tailbone point down into the ground and tilt the bottom of your pelvis slightly forward.

- Slowly turn your head and gaze up at the sky without cramping the back of your neck. Extend your pinky fingers into the sky. Sustain this position for three or four breaths.

- To release yourself from this pose, breathe out and push back with your left leg until your torso is above your right thigh. Bring your left leg back to join the right leg, with both knees together on the ground. Lower your arms until they rest by your sides.

- Breathe out again as you bend forward at the hips and place your hands on the ground, putting you on your hands and knees.

- Raise your hips, returning to downward-facing dog. With both legs and arms straight. Breathe deeply and slowly in. As you exhale, lower your hips until your knees are on the ground and you stand on all fours.

- Remain in this position for a couple full breaths.

- Repeat the entire process, this time stepping your left foot forward.

The Monkey

Focus: Chest
Level: Intermediate
Total Time: 30 to 60 seconds
Indications: stimulate abdominal organs, increase blood flow to skin, insomnia
Contraindications: hamstring injury, groin injury

The Monkey

The monkey pose, also known as the yoga split, works to open up your chest while simultaneously stretching your groin and legs. It can also stimulate your abdominal organs. Individuals with a hamstring or groin injury should forego this pose.

You should be able to complete a deep lunge comfortably before you attempt the monkey. Don't expect to perform the complete monkey pose when you first start out; take your body only as far as it is able to go and no farther. When you feel resistance, stop. Over time, your body will accept deeper and further stretching.

This is one time you will want to use blocks to support your body in the process of reaching the monkey. Be careful to warm up your body well beforehand, using poses that activate your legs, hips and back, before you get started. You'll want to have three blocks handy. You can place a couple of blocks slightly ahead you to use for support later.

- Begin in downward-facing dog. Stand on your hands and knees with your shoulders directly above your hands and your hips above your knees. Press your hips straight up until both legs and arms are straight. Let your neck continue the straight line of your back from hips to head. Breathe deeply and slowly.

- Step your right leg forward until it is between your hands and your foot is firmly planted on the ground.

- Lower your left knee to the ground and raise your torso straight up.

  Support your hands on blocks (or anything sturdy) and wiggle your left leg further back, feeling the stretch in your thighs and psoas. When you experience resistance, stop and place a block beneath the top of your right thigh. Allow yourself to rest there for several breaths.

- Over time you will be able to extend your left leg even further, sinking down until eventually, both legs are resting on the floor.

- To release this pose, place your hands on blocks to either side and push down to raise your torso. Bend your left knee and pull your leg forward until your knee is under your hip. Bend your right knee and pull your right leg back until you are standing on both knees.

- Lower your hands from the blocks to the ground directly beneath your shoulders and raise your hips to bring you back into downward-facing dog.

- Rest in this position for several breaths before repeating the process, this time with your left leg forward.

The Upward-Facing Dog

Focus: Chest
Level: Intermediate
Total Time: 15 to 30 seconds
Indications: asthma
Contraindications: carpal tunnel syndrome, back injury, headache, pregnancy

The Upward-Facing Dog

The upward-facing dog stretches your chest, lungs, abdomen, and shoulders while simultaneously building strength in your arms, wrists, and spine. Regular use can enhance your posture and tone your hips. Experts credit the upward facing dog with relieving asthma symptoms. Anyone with carpal tunnel syndrome, a back injury, pregnancy, or a headache should avoid this pose.

- Begin by lying face down with your legs extended behind you and the tops of your feet touching the ground.

- Place your palms on the ground just below your shoulders, with your fingers pointing forward. Breathe in and push down with your hands, straightening your arms and raising your upper body off the ground. Tense your thighs and turn them slightly inward. Rotate your arms slightly out.

- Tip the bottom of your hips forward and keep the muscles engaged. Tighten your shoulder blades, drawing them together. As you breathe in, allow your rib cage to expand. Sustain this expansion as you exhale.

- Lift your torso through the top of your chest without pushing your ribs forward. Gaze ahead.

- Remain in this position for 15 to 30 seconds while continuing to breathe steadily.

- To release this pose, breathe out and allow your body to sink to the ground.

The Wild Thing

Focus: Chest
Level: Intermediate
Total Time: 10 breaths
Indications: depression, exhaustion
Contraindications: rotator cuff injury, carpal tunnel syndrome

The Wild Thing

The wild thing works to open your chest, shoulders, hip flexors and lungs while simultaneously building strength in your upper back and shoulders. Experts believe it can offer relief for depression and exhaustion. If you have a rotator cuff injury or carpal tunnel syndrome, you should forego this pose.

- Start in downward-facing dog. Stand on your hands and knees with your shoulders directly above your hands and your hips above your knees. Press your hips straight up until both legs and arms are straight. Let your neck continue the straight line of your back from hips to head. Breathe deeply and slowly.

- Move forward into the plank pose.

- Shift your weight onto your right hand and turn onto the edge of your outer right foot. You are shifting into a side plank. Breathe in and lift your hips. Keep your weight on your right hand and press your fingertips into the ground while keeping the top of your arm bone behind you.

- Breathe out and slide your left foot behind you, bending your knee and

keeping your toes on the ground.

- Arch your upper back, stretching your shoulder blades into the rear of your rib cage. Breathe in and raise your hips further until your body moves into a backbend with your right foot pressed into the ground.

- Continue to breathe and bend your head back as you stretch your left arm up and away from your head.

- Remain in this position for several breaths, then return to downward-facing dog, with your hips high, your legs straight, and your neck continuing the straight line of your spinal column.

- Repeat this process on the left side of your body.

The Lion

Focus: Chest/Face
Level: Beginner
Total Time: N/A
Indications: bad breath, respiratory infections, teeth grinding or clenching, stuttering, vocal tone, eye health
Contraindications: modification for knee injury

The Lion

The lion can erase any tension you may have built up in your chest and face, while energizing your front throat muscles. Those muscles in the front of your throat are the ones that tend to sag as you age; so the lion can actually slow the aging process. There are anecdotal reports of the lion pose solving stuttering, although no direct research evidence supports this. However, it is credited with strengthening the voice. If you have a knee injury, you should perform the lion while sitting on a chair.

- Kneel on the floor and sit back with your hips atop your heels. Press your palms on the ground in front of you with your fingers pointing forward.

- Lift and spread your fingers wide apart, then press them firmly into the ground as you breathe in deeply through your nose.

- As you breathe in through your nose, open your mouth as widely as you can.

- Engage your eyes, opening them as large as possible and gazing straight ahead (try to look at your eyebrows, if this helps). As you exhale through your mouth, tighten your neck and vocal muscles slightly to emit an audible "haaa" or roar. (Option: try laughing as you exhale, as an additional form of stress relief). At the same time, stick out your tongue as far as you can and try to touch it to the tip of your chin.

  You want your "haaa" to become your best lion "roar" at the same time that you activate your eyes, your tongue, your neck muscles, and your fingers. How's *that* for coordination?

- Inhale as you relax your muscles, then exhale again, roaring powerfully. Repeat as many times as you want.

- To exit this pose, soften your face and relax your body.

Bird of Paradise

Focus: Hips
Level: Advanced
Total Time: 5 to 10 breaths
Indications: balance
Contraindications: knee, hip, or thigh injury

Bird of Paradise

The bird of paradise, geared for yoga experts, is designed to open your hips, hands, legs, and groin area while simultaneously building strength in your legs. Regular performance can boost your balance in a big way. You should stay away from this pose if you have a knee, thigh, or hip injury, however.

- Begin by standing in a modified mountain pose. Stand tall and straight, with your feet a little farther apart than the width of your hips. Bend your knees slightly. Establish a solid connection with the ground by shifting your weight distribution so that it is equally divided between the base of your big toes, the base of your little toes, and both left and right sides of your heels. Bend your knees slightly.

- Inhale and as you begin to exhale, bend forward at the hips, keeping the knees bent, into a modified forward fold.

- Stretch your right arm backward between your legs and touch the ground as far back as possible. Continue to stretch this arm backward; you want to pull your right shoulder as far as you can past your inner thigh. At the same time, stretch your left arm in the opposite direction, as high as possible.

- Rotate your palms and stretch your left arm behind your back until you can clasp your hands behind your right thigh. It will help to shift your weight onto your left leg and to allow your right thigh to rise slightly, pointing your foot so you can continue to touch the ground with your toes. If your hands won't meet, use a towel or strap to bridge the gap between them.

- Shuffle your right toes to the left until you are in a shoulder width stance, with your knees still bent. Shift your weight entirely onto your left foot.

- When your balance is stable across your left foot, keep your hips low and lift your right toes off the ground.

- When your balance is stable, begin – ever-so-gradually – to raise your torso. Keep your left knee bent and take as much time as you need to maintain your balance while you continually adjust to the changing position of your torso. As you rise up, allow your right leg to be carried along, relaxed, with the knee bent.

- As your torso becomes upright, continue to focus on your stable balance as you straighten your left knee and tip your pelvis forward. Hug your right knee to your body, but relax your shoulders downward away from your ears.

- Gaze straight ahead of you and focus on a specific spot to strengthen your balance as you slowly straighten your right leg

- Remain in this position for a couple breaths, then reverse the process to come out of the pose, as follows:

- bend your right knee, gently lower your torso back to the ground, let your right foot return to the ground as you release your hands and let them relax hanging downward. Then raise your torso back up into mountain pose, with your hands relaxed at your sides. Stand tall and straight with your feet separated enough to feel stable. Establish a solid connection with the ground by shifting your weight so that it is equally distributed between the base of your big toes, the base of your little toes, and both the left and right sides of your heels. Breathe in slowly, expanding your lungs and opening your chest. Pause, then breathe out, taking much longer than you took to inhale.

- Repeat this entire process, this time wrapping your arms around your left leg.

Chapter 10: Yoga For The Hands

The Salutation Seal

Focus: Hands
Level: Beginner
Total Time: Up to 5 Minutes
Indications:
Contraindications:

The Salutation Seal

The salutation seal stretches your fingers, wrists and arms while calming your mind and relieving stress and anxiety.

- Begin by standing in mountain pose. Stand tall and straight with your feet separated enough to feel stable. Establish a solid connection with the ground by shifting your weight distribution so that it is equally divided between the base of your big toes, the base of your little toes, and both left

and right sides of your heels.

- Breathe in and press your palms together, fingers up. Gently draw your facing palms toward your body, ultimately resting your thumbs against the top of your chest. Press your palms and fingers together evenly, ensuring that one hand is not pressing harder than the other.

- Drop your head slightly, stretching the back of your neck into your head.

- As you inhale, raise the top of your chest into your thumbs and elongate your armpits by pulling your elbows back.

- You may wish to remain in this position for up to five minutes before returning to mountain pose.

The Deer Seal

Focus: Hands/Breathing
Level: Beginner
Total Time: N/A
Indications: stress, anxiety
Contraindications: wrist injury

Deer Seal

The deer seal is a hand-stretching yoga pose combined with alternate nostril breathing. This breathing exercise is calming and energizing. It also serves to help your brain switch smoothly between left and right hemispheres.

- You can perform this sitting or standing. Make a fist with the fingers of your right hand, while your thumb is sticking out. Keep your index and middle fingers clenched while you straighten your ring and little fingers.

- You are going to breathe through your nose, so close your mouth and keep it closed throughout.

- With your thumb, press your right nostril closed and inhale through the left nostril.

- At the top of your breath, press your left nostril closed as well, using your ring and little fingers.

- Lift your thumb to release your right nostril keeping your left nostril closed with your ring and little fingers as you exhale through your right nostril.

- Keep your right nostril open as you inhale through it. Then, at the top of your breath, close it off. In a moment, open your left nostril by lifting your fingers, and exhale.

- Repeat this combination a few times.

You can use one-sided breathing to help prepare for sleep; in this case you will breathe only through the left nostril. In the morning you can energize yourself by breathing through only the right nostril.

The Scale

Focus: Wrists, abdominals
Level: Intermediate
Total Time: 10 to 15 seconds
Indications: balance, stimulate abdominal organs
Contraindications: wrist, shoulder, ankle, or knee injury

The Scale

The scale focuses on building strength in your wrists, abdominals and arms. It should be avoided by individuals with wrist, shoulder, ankle, or knee injuries. If your hips or thighs are tight, you should also avoid this pose.

When you are beginning to work with the scale, you can separate the lift into two parts. First lift and lower your hips, letting your crossed legs remain on the ground. Use blocks to raise your arms and make this easier, if you wish. Secondly, lift your crossed legs, with your hips remaining on the ground. Eventually you will build up the strength in your abdominals to the point that you can accomplish the full-blown scale pose, as follows:

- Begin in the lotus position. Sit tall, with your feet straight out in front of you. Rotate your right thigh outward from the hip and bend your knee. Keeping your right knee and foot the same distance from the floor, lift

your lower leg with your hands and move it over until your right foot is atop your left hip. Rotate your left hip out and draw your left foot as close to your body as possible. Keeping your left knee and foot the same distance from the floor, lift the leg with your hands and slowly and smoothly bring it up toward your body, placing your left foot atop your right hip to complete the lotus

- If you can't manage a lotus position, the scale can also be reached with your legs crossed..

- Rest the palms of your hands on the ground next to your hips, with your fingers pointed forward. Splay your fingers out to help provide balance.

- Breathe out, press your hands into the ground, narrow your abdominal muscles and raise your legs and hips off the ground. Continue to breathe deeply and regularly.

- Suspend yourself in the air for three seconds.

- To release, breathe out and lower your legs and hips to the ground.

- Cross your legs the other direction and repeat this process.

The Side Crow

Focus: Wrists, core
Level: Intermediate
Total Time: N/A
Indications: balance
Contraindications: lower back or wrist injury

The Side Crow

The side crow builds strength in your core muscles while stretching your wrists and developing your balance. Individuals with lower back or wrist injuries should avoid this pose.

- Begin by squatting. Keeping your knees facing forward, turn your torso to the right and place your hands flat on the ground, perpendicular to your feet, with fingers pointed away from your side. Your hands will be fairly close to your body; you can experiment with the distance until you find the distance that works best for you.

- Lift your fingers, splay them out, and set them down, actively connecting each finger with the ground along its entire length. This will give you maximum control over your balance.

- Shift your weight to the right, bending over your hands and letting your elbows bend back toward your body. The right side of your torso will be

supported by your right arm, while your knees will be supported by your left upper arm.

- Continue to lean farther forward, shifting your weight onto your hands until you are fully supporting your body weight. You will feel your hip weight increase on your arm and then you can lift your feet off the floor.

- Continue to angle your torso forward until your arms are parallel to the floor. Let your feet lift off the ground, shifting your weight completely onto your arms. Breathe.

- Reverse this process to come out of the side crow. Lean backward, allowing your feet to touch the ground. Let them take on the weight of the rest of your body until you can raise your hands off the floor and look straight ahead.

- Repeat this process to the left side.

The Side Plank

Focus: Wrists
Level: Intermediate
Total Time: 15 to 30 seconds
Indications: balance, concentration
Contraindications: shoulder, wrist, or elbow injury

The Side Plank

The side plank strengthens your wrists while incorporating your stomach, legs and arms and increasing your balance. If you have an injury to your shoulder, wrist or elbow you should avoid the side plank.

- Begin in a downward-facing dog. Stand on your hands and knees with your shoulders directly above your hands and your hips above your knees. Press your hips straight up until both legs and arms are straight. Let your neck continue the straight line of your back from hips to head. Breathe deeply and slowly.

- Transition into a plank pose: lower your hips until your body is straight from head to heels. Set your feet together until the big toes touch. Flex your feet, sending your heels down away from your body.

- Shift your right palm slightly to the left, until it is beneath where the center your body was. Keep your left fingers on the ground to help you balance.

- Shift your weight onto the outside of your right foot and slowly turn your body to the right. Stack your left foot atop your right foot.

- Tuck your pelvis and on an inhale, open your chest as you raise your left arm. You can stop with your hand on your waist, or you can continue the stretch until your arm is pointing straight toward the sky. Keep your head and neck on a straight line with the rest of your spine; do **not** drop your head to your shoulder. Your head will be in line with your heart and your pelvis and your body will be a straight diagonal line from the crown of your head all the way to your feet.

- After a couple breaths, exhale and lower your left arm as you roll your straight body back into a plank position and plant your arms shoulder width apart. Raise your hips to return to downward-facing dog and rest there, breathing deeply and steadily.

- Repeat this process, planking to the left.

The Four-Limbed Staff

Focus: Wrists
Level: Intermediate
Total Time: 10 to 30 seconds
Indications: balance, tension, anxiety, depression, posture
Contraindications: carpal tunnel syndrome, pregnancy

The Four-Limbed Staff

The four-limbed staff will build strength in your arms and wrists. Pregnant women and individuals with carpal tunnel syndrome should avoid this pose.

- Start in downward-facing dog. Stand on your hands and knees with your shoulders directly above your hands and your hips above your knees. Press your hips straight up until both legs and arms are straight. Let your neck continue the straight line of your back from hips to head. Breathe deeply and slowly.

- Transition into a plank pose. Tense your shoulder blades across the back of your ribs and move your tailbone toward your pubis.

- Breathe out and gently lower your body, followed by your legs, to a couple of inches above the ground, ensuring that they are both parallel. Avoid allowing your tailbone to point upward but ensure that your legs are turned slightly inward. Pull your pubis toward your belly button.

- Keeping your shoulder blades broad, squeeze your elbows in place and. Push the bottoms of your pointer fingers into the ground. Raise your breastbone and gaze ahead.

- Stay in this position for 10 to 30 seconds. Breathe out and slowly lower your body to the ground until you are lying face down.

Chapter 11: Yoga For The Whole Body

The Half Frog

Focus: Entire body
Level: Intermediate
Total Time: 30 seconds to 2 minutes
Indications: stimulate abdominal organs
Contraindications: neck, shoulder, or lower back injury; blood pressure (high or low), insomnia, migraines

The Half Frog

The half frog builds strength in your back muscles while simultaneously stretching your thighs, ankles, groin, chest, hip flexors, abdomen and throat. It can enhance your posture and stimulate your abdominal organs. If you experience blood pressure problems, insomnia, migraines or neck, shoulder or lower back injuries, you should avoid this pose or consult with an experienced instructor before engaging in the half frog.

- Begin by lying on your stomach. Push your forearms into the ground and raise your head and upper body. Bend your right leg until your heel reaches your right hip. While holding your torso up with your left arm, extend your right hand back and grasp your foot or ankle. Slowly turn your elbow toward the sky as you allow your hand to glide over your foot until you can curl your fingers over your toes.

- Begin pushing your foot toward your hip while keeping your hip and knee aligned.

- Stay in this position for several full breaths, then release your leg and lower your body until you are completely prone on the ground. Breathe.

- Repeat the process, this time bending your left leg

Downward-Facing Dog

Focus: Entire Body
Level: Beginner
Total Time: 3 minutes
Indications: menopause symptoms, menstrual pain, digestion, fatigue, headaches, high blood pressure, insomnia, asthma, sinus problems, back pain
Contraindications: carpal tunnel syndrome, late-term pregnancy

Downward-Facing Dog

The downward-facing dog is one of the most well known yoga poses. It is great for your whole body, with special benefits to your shoulders, hands, lower legs and arches. This pose can stretch your legs and arms and is great for energizing you all over.

For women, the downward dog can relieve menopause symptoms and menstrual pain. Regular performance can help prevent the onset of osteoporosis and may help improve digestion. It can also aid in relieving pain from fatigue, headaches, high blood pressure, insomnia, asthma, sinus problems and back pain. The downward-facing dog is great as a preface to standing poses.

If you suffer from carpel tunnel syndrome then you should avoid this pose or consult with an experienced instructor before engaging in it. Similarly, women with a late-term pregnancy should avoid this pose.

- Begin on your hands and knees. Keep your knees aligned with your hips and your hands slightly in front of your shoulders. Spread your fingers and curl your toes.

- Breathe out and begin to raise your knees off the ground. Keep your knees bent a little bit and raise the soles of your feet away from the ground. Elongate your tailbone toward your pubis. Raise your sitting bones up and draw your inner legs toward your groin through your ankles.

- Breathe out while pushing the tops of your thighs back and push the soles of your feet toward the ground. Keep your knees straight but avoid locking them. Keep the outsides of your thighs firm and slightly turn your upper thighs inward.

- Keep your outer arms firm as you press your index fingers into the ground to raise your inner arms through your shoulders. Firm your shoulder blades before widening and drawing them toward your tailbone. Keep your head firm between your upper arms.

- Stay in this position for one to three minutes. Breathe out, bend your knees toward the ground and fold your upper body over your legs in the child’s pose.

The Staff Pose

Focus: Chest, shoulders, upper back, abdomen
Level: Beginner
Total Time: varies
Indications: asthma, sciatica, digestion
Contraindications: back surgery, lower back injury, wrist injury

Staff Pose

This pose may look like you're simply sitting on the floor with your feet in front of you, but it consists of a lot more. The staff is a basic preparatory pose with benefits all its own. It improves posture as it strengthens your core; it also provides a stamina boost. The staff is therapeutic for asthma and sciatica; among other benefits, it improves digestion. It should be avoided following back surgery, lower back injury, or wrist injury.

- Begin by sitting down on the ground.

- Stretch your legs straight forward from hips to your heels. Your feet will be slightly separated. Press your heels downward and flex your ankles, bending your toes up your legs and toward your torso.

- Place your hands lightly atop your thighs, palms downward, as you shift them slightly inward and press them into the ground. Breathe deeply in, then slowly out.

- Continue to sustain slow, full breathing as you place your thumbs under the edge of your armpits and let the upward force lift your entire torso until your head is straight above your heart, which is directly above your hips.

- Sustaining this tall torso, lower your arms to your sides, touching the ground with your fingertips to steady your posture and balance.

- Remain in this position as long as you want. I suggest you start at 15 to 30 seconds, but work up to five minutes or so.

The Intense Side Stretch

Focus: Hips, Hamstrings, Shoulders, Spine and Wrists
Level: Beginner
Total Time: 10-30 seconds
Indications: digestion, balance
Contraindications: back injury, high blood pressure

The Intense Side Stretch

The intense side stretch is a full-body pose that stretches both upper and lower extremities while focusing on building strength in your legs. It can stimulate your abdominal organs and improve digestion while helping to enhance your sense of balance. The intense side stretch is great to perform before doing twist poses or seated forward bends. If you have ever experienced a back injury or suffer from high blood pressure, you should only do a half bend, which will be explained below.

- Begin by standing in mountain pose. Stand tall and straight with your feet separated enough to feel stable. Establish a solid connection with the ground by shifting your weight distribution so that it is equally divided between the base of your big toes, the base of your little toes, and both left and right sides of your heels.

- Breathe out and step forward three feet with your right leg, keeping your hands on your hips. Place your feet parallel to each other. Tense your

thighs and rotate your right thigh outward until the middle of your kneecap is aligned with your ankle.

- Breathe out and twist your body to the right, matching your pelvis as closely as you can with the front of your mat. Press your left groin into the ground to anchor your back heel to the ground. Visualize yourself squeezing a pillow between your thighs to push them inward. Tense your shoulder blades across your back, elongate your tailbone into the ground and slightly arch your upper back.

- Breathe out and angle your torso forward over your right leg, bending from your hip until your head is pointing toward the ground. Place the tips of your fingers on either side of your right foot. If you cannot reach the ground you can use the aid of a chair or yoga blocks. Press your thighs behind you and elongate your body ahead, raising it through the top of your chest.

- Note: If you suffer from back problems or high blood pressure, you should do only a half bend in front of a wall to help support your body. Breathe out and lower your torso toward the ground, but place your hands on a wall and press into it with your palms to help keep the front of your body longer than your back.

- While in this position, make sure you soften the hip under your front leg, away from your shoulder, to avoid making your body uneven. The bottom of your big toe and your inner heel on your front foot should be planted solidly into the ground. Then you can raise the inner hip of your front leg into your pelvis to deepen the pose.

- If you’re flexible enough, you can bring your body closer to your thigh.

- You can remain in this position for up to 30 seconds.

- To release yourself from this pose, breathe in, press your body up through your back heel while moving your tailbone down into your pelvis and then stepping to your left.

The Wheel

Focus: Whole Body
Level: Intermediate
Total Time: 10 seconds, 3 repetitions
Indications: asthma, back problems, infertility; stimulate pituitary and thyroid
Contraindications: blood pressure (high or low), carpal tunnel, diarrhea, headache, heart problems

The Wheel

The wheel pose, also known as the upward bow, increases strength in the spine, hips, legs, abdomen, wrists, and arms while expanding your lungs and chest. It can stimulate your pituitary and thyroid glands while increasing your energy. It is used therapeutically to treat asthma, back problems, and infertility. Individuals with blood pressure problems, back injuries, carpal tunnel, diarrhea, headaches, or heart problems should avoid this pose or consult with an experienced instructor before engaging in it.

- Lie flat on the ground. Bend your knees and fold them close to your body so that your feet are near your hips. Fold your elbows and expand your palms next to your head, keeping your forearms perpendicular to the ground. Your fingers should be aimed at your shoulders.

- Press the insides of your feet on the ground, breathe out and push your tailbone into your hips as you tense and raise your hips off the ground. Make sure that your thighs and the insides of your feet stay parallel to each other. At this point, take a couple of breaths.

- Press your hands into the ground and your shoulder blades across your back to raise yourself up onto the top of your head. Take a couple more breaths while keeping your arms parallel to each other. While pressing your hands and feet into the ground, press your shoulder blades and tailbone across your back, breathe out, raise your head off the ground and straighten your arms.

- Rotate the tops of your thighs slightly inward and tense the outsides of your thighs. Slim your hip points and elongate your tailbone into the backs of your knees as you raise your pubis toward your stomach.

- Rotate your upper arms outward while shifting your weight onto the bottoms of your index fingers. Expand your shoulder blades and allow your head to dangle. Stay in this position for up to 10 seconds and repeat up to 10 times. Repeat this process three times to receive its full effect

The Bow

Focus: Front Body
Level: Intermediate
Total Time: 20 to 30 seconds
Indications: backaches, constipation, anxiety and respiratory illnesses
Contraindications: migraines, insomnia, blood pressure (high or low), neck injury, lower back injury

The Bow

The bow stretches the entire front-side of your body while building strength in your back muscles. It can boost your posture and can stimulate your neck and abdominal organs. Experts believe the bow can offer relief for backaches, constipation, anxiety, and respiratory illnesses. Individuals with blood pressure problems, neck or lower back injuries, and those who experience migraines or sleeplessness should avoid it or consult with an experienced instructor before engaging in the bow.

- Begin by lying on your stomach with your hands to your side, palms up. Breathe out, bend your knees, and pull the soles of your feet as close to your rear as possible. Grasp your ankles while keeping your knees no wider apart than the width of your hips.

- Breathe in and raise the soles of your feet away from your rear while

simultaneously raising your thighs off the ground. Your head and upper body will naturally rise off the ground as you do this. Push your tailbone into the ground and let your back muscles maintain their softness. As you raise your thighs and heels, squeeze your shoulder blades into your back to open up your chest and your heart. Stare straight ahead.

- Focus on breathing into your back, since it will be difficult to take breaths with your stomach between the ground and your body weight. Do not forget to breathe**.** Stay in this position for 20 to 30 seconds.

- To release yourself from this pose, breathe out as you lower both head and feet to the floor. Rest for several deep breaths

The Camel

Focus: Entire Body
Level: Intermediate
Total Time: 30 to 60 seconds
Indications: respiratory illness, backache, anxiety, menstrual symptoms
Contraindications: low back injury, neck injury, migraines, insomnia

The Camel

The camel is designed to strengthen the back muscles while stretching the entire front side of your body, including your abdomen, throat, chest, and groin. It's also a great way to stretch your deep hip flexors and to improve your posture.

Experts believe the camel can offer relief for symptoms of respiratory illness, backaches, anxiety, and menstrual symptoms. Those who experience problems with blood pressure, who have ever had a low back or neck injury, have migraines, or experience sleeplessness should avoid this pose. At least consult

with an experienced instructor before engaging in it.

- Begin by kneeling on the ground with your knees aligned with your hips and your thighs perpendicular to the ground. Slightly turn your thighs inward to make your hip points narrow and slightly tense your hips. Your outer hips should also remain soft. Press the fronts of your lower legs and the tops of your feet into the ground.

- Place your hands behind your abdomen with the bottoms of your palms right above your hips. Broaden the back of your pelvis with your hands and elongate it into your tailbone. Tense your tailbone into your pubis and press the fronts of your thighs behind you to prevent your groin from pushing forward. Breathe in and raise your heart by squeezing your shoulder blades back.

- Angle your body across the hardness of your shoulder blades and tailbone. Your head should remain raised, your chin pointed toward the top of your chest and your hands on your abdomen. Squeeze your thighs back until they are positioned perpendicularly and return your body to a neutral position and bring your free hand to your foot.

- Ensure that your lower ribs are not dramatically pointed toward the ceiling. Let your front ribs go and raise your front pelvis toward them. Move your lower back ribs away from your abdomen to help elongate your spine. Deeply press your palms into the soles of your feet and rotate your arms outward to turn the creases in your elbows forward. Avoid pushing your shoulder blades together as you do this. You can choose to lower your neck back or keep it neutral.

- Stay in this position for 30 to 60 seconds.

- To release yourself from this position, place your hands on the front of your hip points. Breathe in and raise your head and body through pushing down into your hip points. If you chose to put your neck back, raise it through your chest instead of your chin.

- Bend your knees and fold your thighs down onto your legs, then fold your torso forward and melt into your thighs, resting in child’s pose for a few

breaths.

The Upward-Facing Two-Foot Staff

Focus: Front of Body
Level: Advanced
Total Time: N/A
Indications: concentration, focus, posture
Contraindications: lower back, neck, wrist, or shoulder injury

The Upward-Facing Two-Foot Staff

The upward-facing two-foot staff focuses on stretching the front of your body. Those with lower back, neck, wrist or shoulder injuries should avoid performing this pose.

- Begin by lying on your back with your knees bent. Slide the soles of your feet as close to your hips as you can. Put your palms on the ground on both sides of your head. Push your knees away from you and your hands into the ground. Straighten your arms out and raise your head, upper body and hips into a bow pose. Take three to five breaths.

- Bend one elbow and lower your arm to the ground. Do the same with your other arm. Slowly lower the top of your head to the ground next. Bring your hands together and lace your fingers. Push your elbows and arms into the ground to raise your head and chest.

- Gently walk one foot away from you, followed by the other, until your legs straighten out. Raise your chest by pushing down into the ground with the soles of your feet. Remain in this pose for a few breaths.

- To release yourself from this pose, walk your feet back until they're beneath your knees. Gently drop the top of your head to the ground. Release your hands and return one to the side of your head, followed by the other. Transition into a bow pose. Bring your feet in more and lower your chin to your chest and return to your starting position.

The Pigeon

Focus: Whole Body
Level: Intermediate
Total Time: N/A
Indications: sciatica, urinary disorder
Contraindications: sacroiliac problems, knee injury

The Pigeon

The pigeon opens your hips while stretching your back, groin, thighs, and hip flexors.

- Begin on all fours. Inhale and extend your left leg straight back, pointing your toes. Exhale and lower your left knee, drawing it straight forward until it reaches your hands.

- Allow your right toes to slide straight back until your left thigh is atop the left foot. Lower your hips only as far as you are comfortable. To prevent your left thigh from rolling outward, you can place a folded blanket on the left side as a support.

- Press your fingertips down to raise your torso, with your chest open, and breathe deeply and slowly, feeling the right hip crease and all the way down your leg.

- Slowly walk your left foot slightly to the right.

- Bend your torso forward over your bent left leg, lowering it as far as is comfortable. Rest there, leaning your forehead on the ground or on a support block. Take a few breaths.

- To release yourself from this position, press your palms down to push your torso back up and then return to all fours.

- Repeat the pigeon, this time extending your right knee straight back.

The Supported Headstand

Focus: Whole Body
Level: Advanced
Total Time: Up to 3 Minutes
Indications: sinus problems, asthma, insomnia
Contraindications: back injury, heart condition, blood pressure (high or low), neck injury, headache, menstruation

The Supported Headstand

The supported headstand increases the strength in your spine, arms, legs, and lungs while simultaneously energizing your glands. Regular performance can help build good posture and can aid in digestion. Experts believe that the supported headstand can offer relief to individuals who experience sinus problems, asthma, and sleeplessness. Individuals with back injuries, heart conditions, blood pressure problems, neck injuries, headaches or currently menstruating should forego this pose.

This is a highly advanced pose and should be performed with care to avoid injury. Especially in the beginning, you should work in front of a wall, or with the help of an assistant. Take your time. if you rush this pose you're just setting yourself for all kinds of injury, so take it slow and easy.

When you approach the headstand, begin by practicing the first instruction only, several times, with brief rest in between. The purpose is to build strength into the muscles you will call on to support you in the full-blown headstand. When you are ready, expand your practice to the first two instructions, then the first three, etc., until your body is ready for the full-blown supported headstand.

- Get down on all fours, with your hands directly below your shoulders. Using the location of your hands as a marker, place your elbows were your hands were. Place your forearms and palms straight ahead of your elbows, splaying your fingers and engaging every joint in your hand with the ground. Don't let your shoulders and back sag down; instead, engage your core to support your back and shoulders. Draw your shoulders away from the ears and breathe.

- After your strength is firmly established here, with your elbows still grounded, bring your hands together and interlace your fingers to provide a pocket to hold your head. Curl your toes and place the top of your head into the pocket of your interlaced fingers. Keep your shoulders and back engaged in supporting your torso without putting weight on your head. Walk your knees forward a little bit, still breathing steadily.

- Continue to draw your shoulders away from your ears as you press up with your feet to raise your hips into the air. Keep the knees slightly bent.

- Walk your toes toward your body, straightening your knees and pressing increasingly more of your weight onto your elbows, not your head. Keep your back straight and imagine pressing your belly button into your spine.

- Gradually walk your legs closer to your torso, rising up on your toes until all the weight of your body is being borne by your elbows and very little is on your head.

- At this point, bend one leg, drawing your foot toward your chest and experimenting with touching only your big toe on the other foot to the ground. Keep your belly pressing in toward your spine, but don't forget to breathe. Lower this leg and do the same with your other leg.

- When you're ready to go further, bend both legs and draw them to your chest.

- Now you're ready for the final extension of the full-blown supported headstand. Extend up through your toes, drawing your belly button even deeper in toward your back. When your legs are straight, squeeze your thighs together and extend them further up into the sky. Keep your shoulders pressed away from your ears and continue to breathe.

- To release yourself from this pose, reverse the process, bending and lowering first one leg to your chest, then the other. Keep pressing your belly button in without moving your shoulders. Touch down one set of toes and then the other. Breathe in and walk your toes away from your chest. As you exhale, lower your knees to the ground. Sit back on your feet and straighten up your torso gradually, one vertebra at a time, lifting your head last.

- Once again, lace your fingers together. This time, place them on the back of your head, at the base of your skull and press your head straight back into your hands for a few seconds before releasing your arms down to your sides. Once you have been upright for about a minute, fold your torso over your thighs, with your hands at your sides and your face down, melting into the ground in child's pose. Rest, letting your muscles relax and taking long, slow breaths.

Chapter 12: Mudras and Breathing Techniques

Let's go back to our hands for a moment. One concept in Hatha Yoga, known as Mudras, involves using certain hand positions to communicate effectively with your inner self. Yoga holds that you can use your hands to reach the rest of your physical body and touch your emotions. Mudras are easy to learn and can be an effective part of meditation. You can perform mudras anytime and anywhere, whether you are sitting, lying down, standing or moving around. For the best results, experts recommend holding a mudra for at least half an hour, but even if you perform them in five-minute increments, you should still be able to experience their effects. It is ideal to perform mudras with both hands, but even single-handed practice can be effective. Here are some easy and helpful mudras that you can start with:

Seal of Knowledge

This mudra can help trigger knowledge, responsiveness and composure within your soul. Perform this mudra by bringing the tips of your index fingers to touch the end of their neighboring thumbs, forming a circle while keeping your other fingers erect.

Prayer

This mudra can bring together and balance out the two sides of your body. In yoga, the left side of your body is considered female, while the right side is viewed as male. The prayer mudra can help reconcile these opposing forces. Scientific evidence shows that this mudra is truly meditative. Simply press your palms together and press the outer edges of your thumbs into your breastbone as you breathe in, slowly and deeply, followed by an even slower exhale.

Seal of Sun and Life

This mudra can recharge your energy, strengthen your nerves and promote positive overall health. Perform the seal of sun and life by bringing the tips of your ring fingers to meet the thumbs of each hand, forming a circle while keeping your other fingers erect. Again, remain in this position as long as you want, breathing in deeply, then out slowly.

Mental Clarity

This mudra can help clear your mind to allow your intuition to develop and work at its fullest capacity. Perform this mudra by bringing the tips of your pinky fingers to meet your thumbs, forming a circle while keeping your other fingers erect. Again, breathe as you remain calm and still, letting yourself absorb life from your breath.

Seal of Patience

Like its name, this mudra can help develop your patience, insight, and willpower. To perform the seal of patience, bring the tips of your middle fingers toward your thumbs to form a circle while keeping your other fingers erect. In this final mudra, continue to breathe slowly and regularly as you let your mind slow down and rest.

Your Breathing

Breathing techniques can also be helpful for grounding both body and soul. You can practice breathing techniques on their own or you can partner them with a yoga routine and various mudras to experience maximum effectiveness. It is common to practice breathing techniques prior to engaging in yoga, because it can help you move away from your busy day and approach a state of relaxation. Here is one of the most used and highly effective breathing techniques:

The Three-Part Breath:

- Lie on your back and shut your eyes. Soften your face and calm your body. Extend your legs out.

- Take ample time to become aware of your breathing.

- Take control over your natural breath as you take in deep breaths and slowly exhale, completely emptying the air.

- Allow your stomach to expand with air as you breathe in and completely empty it on each exhale.

- Five of these mindful breaths complete Part One.

- Breathe in and fill your lungs with air. When your lungs feel full, breathe in even further to broaden your rib cage.

- Breathe out and let the air escape your rib cage followed by your stomach.

- Breathe in, repeating this process for five breaths to complete Part Two.

- Breathe in and allow your stomach and rib cage to expand with air. Inhale further. Allowing air to fill the upper lobes of your lungs, the area that presses up to your collarbone; surround your heart with air.

- Breathe out, letting the air escape from the collarbone area, then from around your heart, followed by your rib cage and your stomach.

- Repeat this process for five to 10 breaths to complete Part Three.

The Skull Shining Breath

This is a little more advanced than the three-part breath; it can help warm and energize your body. Pregnant women, however, should forego this process.

- Sit down with your legs crossed and take a few deep breaths to allow your body to situate itself and become settled into the ground.

- Take a deep breath in but only partially fill your stomach with air. Breathe out quickly and strenuously. If you desire, you can rest your hands on the stomach to better sense the forceful contraction.

- Inhale fully and naturally. Continue to take strenuous and fast breaths out and exhale at a rapid pace. When you first take up this exercise, start out with 10 breaths. Over time, work your way up to performing three sets of 10 breaths.

- If at any point you begin to feel dizzy during this breathing exercise, return to normal, relaxed exhaling.

Chapter 13: Sample Yoga Routines

At this point, you are familiar with the best and most popular yoga poses and you now have the information you need to perform each one properly. Your work with individual poses can serve as a great starting point. It allows you to learn the correct process for performing each pose; it also helps you discover some of the benefits of each one. Now, it is time to learn how to enhance the effectiveness of these poses by combining them into a yoga routine.

Individual poses are static stretches; you hold a pose for a predetermined amount of time before releasing it. When you transition from one pose to another, you are performing a dynamic stretch. Dynamic stretches generate heat, keeping your muscles loose and pliable. The dynamic motion of shifting from one pose to another also helps to enhance your range of motion.

There are endless combinations of yoga positions; I will introduce you to some of the most widely used and most helpful routines. There are many widely known routines you can easily practice and learn as a beginner. While you can always make up your own routines, I recommend using these pre-planned programs at first. Later you can create your own sequences, using ideas you will find in the next chapter.

Quick Beginner's Routine For Back and Lower Body

This quick and simple routine for beginners focuses on working your hips, hamstrings and spine. It combines the benefits of each position with gentle dynamic transitions. This routine is good for newcomers to yoga. It is short, accommodating a busy lifestyle. At the same time, it will strengthen your hips, back, and legs, three essential areas for overall health.

- Begin with up to 20 **pelvic tilts** to warm up your back.
- Move onto all fours and perform the **cat-cow** sequence up to 10 times to extend the pelvic tilts in warming up your spine.
- Step your body into a **downward-facing dog**.
- At the end of downward dog, return to the starting position, then step forward into the **low lunge**, followed by a **straight-leg lunge**.
- Return to the **downward-facing dog**.
- Step forward into a **low lunge** on the other side followed by a **straight-leg lunge**.
- Walk into a **standing forward bend,** then gently move your body up into **the mountain** pose.
- From the mountain pose, raise your arms above your body, press the palms of your hands together, and shift your shoulders down, away from your ears.
- Lower into a **standing forward bend**, and then raise your back until it is horizontal by extending the tips of your fingers on the ground.
- From this position, move into mountain pose with your arms raised over your head. Repeat this transitional movement up to five times.
- Next, perform a **pigeon pose** to open your hips. Hold this position for up to 20 breaths.

- At this point, you may insert any pose that focuses on your hips, spine or hamstrings.

- End this routine by coming to rest in the **corpse** pose, giving your body permission to relax.

Flexibility Routine for Beginners

This routine, also ideal for beginners, focuses on improving your flexibility. It can keep your muscles strong and active and can help you avoid injury. Here, we will focus on stretching your shoulders, your hamstrings, and your hips, the areas where most people experience stiffness. You can practice each pose in this routine individually, moving from each one directly into the next.

- **The big toe.**
- **The standing forward bend.**
- **The triangle.**
- **The wide-leg forward bend.**
- **The child.**
- **The happy baby.**
- **The pigeon.**
- **The eagle.**
- **The bridge.**
- **The cow face.**

The Early Morning Sun Salutation

A Sun Salutation routine is one of the most well-known yoga sequences. While you can do this any time of the day or night, many people find it helpful to practice this at the start of their day.

- Begin by standing tall in **the mountain** pose.
- Press your palms together and hold them in front of your chest.
- Breathe in as you raise your arms above your head, touching palms again.
- Lower your shoulders from your ears and stare up at your hands.
- Breathe out, lower your arms to your sides, and fold your torso at the hips into a **forward bend**.
- Breathe in and move your right foot backward into a **lunge**. Raise your arms over your head with your palms together. Allow your chest to lift with your arms. Gaze toward your hands.
- Breathe out, move down onto your hands and knees and then breathe in as you slip into **the cow**.
- From there, curl your toes, breathe out, and fold your body into a **downward-facing dog**. Remain in this position for five breaths.
- Breathe in as you raise your head and torso, step your right leg forward into a **lunge**, then transition into a **standing forward bend** as you exhale.
- Breathe in and raise your arms over your head. Breathe out and return them to the center of your chest, palms together.

Stress Relief Routine

This quick routine can help you relax and calm your soul on a day where you are feeling very anxious and restless. Perform this routine at least three times for the best results. This routine is ideal for advanced beginners to intermediate-level players.

- **The tree.**
- **The warrior.**
- **The reverse warrior.**
- **The warrior 2.**
- **The deer seal.**

The Cool-down

A cool-down routine is essential for yoga, as it is for any type of physical exercise. You can perform these poses individually, to calm your body, or you can perform them together at the end of an invigorating yoga workout. It provides a refreshing way to close out any yoga session.

- **The pigeon.**
- **The extended puppy.**
- **The happy baby.**
- **The cat.**
- **The corpse.**

Chapter 14: Creating Your Own Routine

When you have mastered most of the yoga positions in this book, including the sample routines, you may want to branch out to create a personalized yoga routine. When you make up your own routine, you have the freedom to address your personal limitations and honor the needs of your body. A personalized yoga routine can flex with your increased flexibility; you can adjust it to boost your practice to the next level or shape it to address specific physical, mental, or emotional needs as they arise.

Define Your Objectives

Before you set out to create your own routine, first clearly define your goals. Are you simply looking for a healthy way to relieve stress, boost your energy and feel great about yourself? Do you want to use yoga as a means of physical fitness? Do you need to develop your breathing techniques? Are you looking to treat a specific physical or emotional condition? These are important questions; your answers will help you focus your routine on the things that are important.

It can also be helpful to discuss your routine with your physician. A medical professional who knows your age and physical condition will be able to guide you regarding what to focus on and what to avoid.

In my situation, for example, I have a bad shoulder and two bad knees, so I choose leg poses designed to build up the strength in my thighs, to stretch the other leg muscles, and to open up my shoulders, keeping them active and flexible. My physical restrictions helped shape a routine that will build strength in other parts of my body as well – in my case my back and wrists – to avoid injury that would prevent me from using yet additional yoga strategies.

Here are some ideas for custom routines that benefit specific needs:

- Anti-anxiety poses for a calm mind.
- A restorative sequence to help your muscles relax.

- An energizing early-morning yoga routine to start your day off right.
- A soothing pre-bedtime yoga routine to improve your sleeping patterns.
- Balance and core strength improvement.
- Treatment for specific ailments, such as sciatica or asthma.

The Logistics of Yoga

Next, you'll need to determine **where** you will perform your yoga routine and for **how long**. Ideally, you would work up to an hour to an hour and a half per day, but this is hardly mandatory. You can practice yoga anywhere, even if you can only spare five minutes at a time. I practice yoga in my living room, at a time when everyone else is out of the house. I usually do my yoga first thing in the morning. However, these factors are completely up to you. Do whatever best suits your individual lifestyle and your needs while respecting your limitations.

Go For The Ambiance

To boost your yoga experience, you can always light candles, burn some incense, or release essential oils into the air. These can help you peel away the layers of tension applied throughout the day and encourage you to be present, all there, living in the moment.

I also find it helpful to play calming music while I practice yoga. I simply tune into my favorite nature station on Pandora Radio (found at www.pandora.com). Feel free to utilize relaxing tracks on YouTube – they don't cost anything and can really enhance your experience. You can also purchase recordings designed for specifically for yoga. Since yoga is a mind-body-spirit event, anything you can do to tame your brain and help your emotions simmer down will be helpful.

Routine Elements

Once you have answered the major questions – the where and when of your yoga practice – you can then begin to map out your routine. I suggest you review the previous chapters, marking the poses that fit your lifestyle, goals, and needs the best. For example, if you have a knee injury, you can review the chapter on yoga for legs and choose from the poses that don't have contraindications for

knee injuries. Strengthening the tissues in neighboring areas can protect from re-injury and may contribute to healing. Many poses that focus on other parts of the body will provide modifications for common injuries that would otherwise preclude their use.

Check which yoga poses you can transition into most smoothly, to create an effective sequence. The best part about yoga is that, while many poses focus on a specific part of your body, the process of transitioning into a pose often involves other muscles, making yoga very easily a whole-body activity.

Remember to include a warm-up on the front end of your routine. This is very important for preparing both your body and your mind to reap the benefits of yoga. You can use the information provided in Chapter 3, to get you started. **The mountain** pose, as first introduced in Chapter 3, is a great starting point; it's used as the basis of many other asanas. Since it's probably the first pose you'll master, its sheer simplicity can ease your mind and body into "yoga time" without the stress of remembering where to put your hands and feet, and how to coordinate it all with your breath. **Sun salutations** are also a basic and simple way to ease into a yoga routine.

If you are just starting to explore yoga, don't attempt to create your own routine right away. As with any type of physical activity, your own routine often will evolve naturally, as you gain proficiency in performing the various poses. Your personal routine will develop through trial and error. I've tried many poses; some are less needful; others are too uncomfortable. I leave out anything that causes pain and what is beyond my body to execute, keeping the poses that work well for me and address the current needs of my body.

I recommend performing each pose in a predetermined sequence. Doing so can really help you memorize how to properly execute each individual pose. At first, you may need a written list to aid your memory, but after consistent repetition, your mind and body will know what to do next and you will be able to smoothly transition between poses.

Re-evaluate your yoga practice every few months. Especially if you're a beginner, you'll notice after a few weeks that some of the poses you had to forego because they were just too uncomfortable to attempt have become attainable, and those that were challenging are easily managed. What pushed you to your limit may even be found enjoyable over time. Even experienced

yoga practitioners will continue to progress in their abilities and may be find themselves able to perform poses that were previously “out of reach”, some quite literally.

Conclusion

I hope this book was able to help you learn how beneficial yoga can be to you, while giving you clear instructions that showed you how to perform the most popular poses easily and with confidence.

The benefits of yoga are seemingly endless. You have seen how yoga can support your health by helping to improve your posture, by energizing your internal organs, by building strength and suppleness into your muscles, and by supporting your mental and spiritual well-being. Whatever your age, you can easily begin to practice yoga, using the instructions in this book. Even physical injuries and activity restrictions are no obstacle. With more than a hundred yoga forms from which to choose, many of which offer modifications to accommodate specific injuries, you will be able to stretch and strengthen your entire body. From beginning yoga positions to advanced poses, you now have access to the best of yoga, accessible practices that can bring increased health to every part of your body, mind, and spirit.

Best of all, you can do yoga in the comfort and privacy of your own home! No need to spend precious funds on expensive classes, not to mention the expenditure of gas and the time it takes to get there! Your yogic practice can easily work into your lifestyle and daily routine. A pose here, a mudra there, and before you know it, you have stretched and strengthened your entire body and kept your mind energized throughout the day!

Did you purchase this book as a beginner, looking for a starting point? You can begin today. Pick a relaxing and open area where you can practice with minimal distractions. Start off easy, but don't let time constraints prevent you from experiencing yoga's amazing effects. You can begin now by selecting one of the beginner-level poses and giving yourself five minutes of serenity. Tomorrow, do the same thing. Before you know it, you'll be well on your way, helping yourself to the best health-boosting, life-giving practices you could ever choose.

Are you already familiar with the basics of yoga but are looking to break out of old boring routines? Are you looking to develop a comprehensive yoga practice that will truly help you, body, mind and spirit? The intermediate and advanced

poses may be just what you need to boost your practice to the next level. Give yourself a gift; allocate a little time from your busy schedule to assess what your body needs, then select the specific yoga poses designed to address those needs.

I encourage you to review the various poses and select a few that will stretch you slightly beyond what you already know. You have already experienced the healing power of yoga; now discover the deeper well of energy, inner cleansing, and spiritual/mental awareness that is stored up in these additional yoga poses and mudras.

Review your current yoga practice in light of the powerful information in Chapters 13 and 14. Ensure that you are working each part of your body by choosing positions from each of Chapters 3 through 12. Adjust your routine by adopting the practices that can benefit you the most. As you implement your changes, pay special attention to how your body, mind, and spirit are growing and changing. In three weeks, perform another review to evaluate the effectiveness of your changes. Tweak your plan as needed to get the most benefits. Before you get bored, swap out a few old poses for some new ones, always paying attention to your body and its needs.

Do this before you get distracted by the demands of life. Do it now! Inner wholeness and outer strength await you.

Thanks for reading.

If this book helped you or someone you know in any way then I invite you to leave a nice review right now. It would be greatly appreciated!

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Thank You